

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

REPRESENTING AMBIGUITY: LIMINALITY AND TRANSFORMATION
IN SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Anglia Ruskin University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisors Professor Sarah Annes Brown, Jeremy Mulvey and Dr Leah Tether for their invaluable advice and support throughout this project. I am also grateful to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre for granting me permission to observe rehearsals and explore the theatre and archives, and for hosting my subsequent exhibition.

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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OCTOBER 2016

Although there has been extensive research into Shakespearean text and performance, visual responses (other than film) have received limited attention, and few fine artists have made a sustained engagement with Shakespeare. This series of paintings and accompanying commentary offer a lateral, imaginative response to the plays and their historical and contemporary contexts.

My research is a visual exploration of ambiguity, liminality and transformation, investigated concurrently in terms of text, performance and painting. My primary context is Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, which has provided a crucial contextual and conceptual focus.

During a period as Artist in Residence at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, I observed rehearsals and performances, and undertook research in the costume and prop stores, library and archives. My study has been much informed and stimulated by literary and historical research, and a significant aspect of the project has been to create an interdisciplinary dialogue, examining how theory and practice, the textual and the visual, inform each other.

Various strands of research have emerged through practical and theoretical investigation: ideas of past and present; magic, supernatural and the uncanny; ambiguity of identity; costume and disguise. My examination of liminal states, boundaries and thresholds has enabled me to reflect on, and develop, many of the preoccupations and problems that lie behind my practice: the nature of silence, the translation of movement, the power of stillness and empty space, the nuances of meaning and perception inherent in the androgynous figure, and, as an overarching theme, liminality of both the theatrical and pictorial space.

Shakespeare, Globe Theatre, painting, ambiguity, liminality, interdisciplinary.

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PROLOGUE

In 2003, I visited Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London for the first time. The experience was pivotal. My initial reaction was a powerful sense of connection, and a sudden feeling of recognition and affinity. Ideas and themes with which I had long been preoccupied were here brought together and given life. I have long been fascinated by the past; my paintings are strongly indebted to the Renaissance art of Italy and Northern Europe, Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits and influenced, more recently, by Shakespeare's plays. This fixation on a specific period in history might well have proved unsustainable and unproductive, the sources of reference too remote and intangible, were it not for that visit to the new Globe. Mine is a visual language, the Globe's a theatrical one, but this theatre all at once provided a living context, and produced a contemporary focus that I felt compelled to understand and articulate. Not only was there the prospect of clarifying and articulating existing ideas but also exciting possibilities for future development. I subsequently gained access to the Globe to draw, and later worked there more formally as Artist in Residence, conducting research in the library, costume and prop archives as well as making drawings during performances and rehearsals. The resulting solo exhibition 'Within This Wooden O', shown at Shakespeare's Globe Exhibition space in 2012, comprises the practical element of my PhD thesis.

This commentary explores and analyses my practice in the specific context of the Globe project. It addresses themes suggested by historical, literary and theatrical references that directly or indirectly influence the painted image. In contemplating this group of images I extricate meaning and gain understanding of how theoretical and observational information is expressed, interpreted and translated through painting, and how the painting process in turn prompts fresh avenues for research. I will identify and examine influences that have an actual, tangible impact on the development of images and inform my conceptual thinking.

Over the course of this project, a number of key preoccupations materialised: ideas of past and present; magic, supernatural and the uncanny; ambiguity of identity; costume and disguise. These distinct threads became apparent at an early stage of my research, and in fact any one could provide a starting point for an

independent and substantial project. However, these overlapping and interconnected strands were essential, integral parts of a coherent whole: all affect the development of images and are absorbed into the process of painting.

Certain key questions surfaced and persisted:

- *Can the painted image express on a static two-dimensional surface the theatrical space and sequential action of performance?*

The space of the Globe theatre is distinctive. The now familiar and common theatre design of proscenium arch and stage frames and confines the performance space, as do to some extent the ‘thrust’ stage or plays performed ‘in the round’. The Globe auditorium is not only more inclusive, embracing players and audience in shared space and light, but the entire building has a unique impact on the audiences’ response, and the actors’ approach to their performance. The nature of this circular, womb-like space is discussed in more detail later, but the architecture and design have had a significant and direct influence on the content and compositions of this body of work. While watching rehearsals and performances, or simply drawing in the empty auditorium, the building itself became an equally important ‘character’ or subject, and a dominating visual and emotional influence on subsequent imagery. Observation of the action and activities of the actors and others within that space suggested and reinforced ideas on the liminal nature of the theatrical space, and – especially during rehearsals - the actors’ relationship with the space, as they moved between reality and performance, disappearing and reappearing from backstage to stage, and shifting between reality and artifice.

The initial challenge of translating the temporal into the spatial – the action of the performance into the static pictorial space - prompted much contemplation of the fundamental differences as well as similarities between painting and theatre. Consideration of this issue developed beyond the simplistic depiction of a figure in movement, to an exploration of the potency of stillness and silence in the painted image.

- *Can a painting express the transformative, fictive and illusive aspects of performance?*

Recognition of the connection between the starting point of theatrical cross-dressing and the broader liminality of performance and player was a fascinating stimulus for exploration. The theme of ambiguity expanded to encompass an investigation of more broad-ranging parallels between painting and theatre: ideas of liminality, ambiguity, illusion, narrative, transformation, translation and interpretation inhere in both. Again, the observational experience at the Globe was critical in developing this theme, changing the emphasis and scope of this project from a study of the ambiguity of identity to a conscious awareness of the figures as performers, supported by wider reading on cross-dressing and cross-gender issues both in historical and contemporary performance contexts. My concern, as I explore later, is predominantly in the visual uncertainty and fluidity of theatrical performance and the performativity of gender; a frequent theme in Shakespeare's plays where he plays with disguise, illusion and mistaken identity. As Stephen Orgel observes, 'The interchangeability of the sexes is, on both the fictive and the material level, an assumption of this theatre.' (1996, p.18) Increased exploration of this ambiguity of identity suggested further research areas and ideas for images, and as a result the figures in my paintings became more deliberately androgynous, demonstrated particularly in the paintings *Fool and Puppet* (2010) (Figure 34), *Make Our Faces Vizards to Our Hearts* (2011) (Figure 27), and *It is But a Shadow's Shadow* (2012) (Figure 37).

- *Can a painting express theatre's multiple liminalities?*

In experiencing and engaging with a theatrical performance, the viewer's imagination is suspended between illusion and reality, past and present. Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2003) compares this experience to a 'waking dream' (2003, p. 3), and in 'Mélancolie de l'art', (1985), Sarah Kofman observes that the theatre is:

...a building given over to 'representations', in a room designed for spectacle...you submit yourself to a real ritual. This ritual...seems

nonetheless to be necessary for a catharsis to occur, which you have sought in the theatre as a means of forgetting – during the performance – your daily anxieties.

(Kofman, 1985, p. 73)

The contemplation of a painting can be a similar experience, but visual language is ambiguous, open to interpretation: it suggests multiple layers of meaning and reality. The same is true of theatrical performance, yet, unlike a theatre and its performances, a painting is silent, still, and timeless; a frozen moment.

The Globe stage is a liminal and transformational space: the drama shifts between shadows and light, between sound and silence, between imagination and reality. There is too the suggestion of the uncanny in the shadowy, hidden spaces of the theatre. In Shakespearean text and performance, there is also the prevalence of the supernatural, of magic and characters that flit between this world and another, and similarly in the subjects of my paintings. Liminality is also inherent in the creative process - that transformational space between the start of a painting and its completion in which so many conscious and unconscious connections and decisions are made. This transitional, developmental state where influences are absorbed and expressed is examined in the Epilogue.

- *Can a painting link past and present?*

Shakespeare's Globe's status as a reconstruction, an anomaly perhaps, has sharpened my concern with the connection between present and past, our relationship with history, and with contemporary creative responses to the past. The original Globe was where Shakespeare's company first played *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. (Gurr, 1989) Consequently, this theatre symbolises a bridge between the historical and the contemporary world; a liminal space where past and present coincide and co-exist. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper begin their introduction to *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (2008) with a statement from W. B. Worthen: 'Globe performativity enables a direct expression of the Shakespearean past and its

articulation in the present' (2003, cited in Carson and Karim-Cooper, 2008, p.1). Similarly, mine is a contemporary perspective strongly influenced by history: by the ghosts of the Renaissance painters and the ghosts of the original Globe Theatre, of the players, of the audiences, and of Shakespeare. The new Globe's ethos has been inspirational in enabling me to articulate this crucial aspect of my work. Carson and Karim-Cooper talk of an 'integration of approaches', (2008, p. 9) and 'a close collaborative relationship between the scholar and the actor' (2008, p.3) and observe that: 'Theatrical, educational and scholarly practices are.....increasingly beginning to overlap and inform one another'. (2008, p.9) The practice of close collaboration between scholars and practitioners has resulted in fresh and vigorous interpretations of Shakespeare at the new Globe. Such a productive and reciprocal relationship between academic research and practical exploration provides a basis for creative and imaginative contemporary responses, an approach which closely mirrors my research and practice methodology. Similarly, when developing images in the studio, the use of contemporary photographic reference from models and from the Globe, combined with historical visual and verbal sources, demonstrates the fundamental transhistorical nature of this project. The paintings deny specific definition of time and place; these contexts and definitions are deliberately uncertain and inconstant.

The sections of the commentary reflect these various threads, and the headings, in the form of quotes from Shakespeare, echo the titles of the paintings and reinforce the way in which an ongoing preoccupation with Shakespeare underpins my developing practice. These questions, though remaining pertinent, were often equivocal and mutable. This project is an exploration, and as such is concerned with contemplating possibilities as well as answers.

My painting practice in general, and the Globe paintings in particular, are central to all discussion, analysis and interpretation and it is from this perspective that I engage with theory, critical reading, and other themes that emerge through the paintings and from other sources. In consequence, the rationale for selection, interpretation and emphasis is inevitably subjective. I will also refer to relevant past

paintings and works by other artists, and these are discussed specifically in terms of how they relate to this project, my practice, or the field of Shakespeare-related imagery. An evaluation of their place in a wider conventional art historical or theoretical context is beyond the remit of this thesis.

Throughout this commentary, when referring specifically to the contemporary Globe theatre, I will use the name 'Shakespeare's Globe', and for the original Globe (specifically the period 1599-1613) 'original Globe'. However, the Globe is frequently considered as an amalgamation of both present and past theatres, in which case it will be simply termed 'the Globe'.

Influences and contexts

My paintings have directly referred to Renaissance imagery for many years, and the use of Shakespearean motifs and Elizabethan costume was a comparatively superficial appropriation of a historical idiom. However, the introduction to Shakespeare's Globe prompted a more explicit investigation into Shakespearean theatre, and enabled the development of a more complex and sophisticated engagement with Shakespeare and theatrical space. The initial access to the auditorium offered material inspiration for my early Globe paintings, that already indicated future preoccupations with costume, architecture, stage and discovery space. Images from this time include *The Tiring House* (2005) (Figure 1), and *Let the Music Creep in Our Ears* (2006) (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Rosalind Lyons, *The Tiring House* (2005)



Figure 2: Rosalind Lyons, *Let the Music Creep in Our Ears* (2006)



Figure 3: Rosalind Lyons, *Woman in Red with Black Cat* (2002)



Figure 4: Rosalind Lyons, *Woman with Apricot* (2003)

During my MA, a particular feature that emerged from reflection on past work was the cross-dressed figure. Originally not a conscious expression, this was subsequently recognised as a recurring subject (examples are *Woman in Red with Black Cat* (2002) (Figure 3) and *Woman with Apricot* (2003) (Figure 4), prompting a further focus on ambiguity of gender and identity in relation to the dramatic convention of disguise in Shakespearean drama. This study marked the introduction to critical writing on Shakespearean text and performance, from which more extensive investigation developed. The project has been supported and informed by research across a broad range of subjects and disciplines including theatrical and social history, art history, literature, performance and costume, as well as more specific areas of Shakespearean criticism. But, early on, it became apparent that themes that had been sensed rather than clearly understood or identified were found addressed in theoretical and critical writing on performance and literature, rather than in the field of fine art.

Certain texts were particularly influential in informing, both visually and verbally, the principal questions and issues in this project. The early interest in the ambiguity of gender introduced me to writing on this aspect of early modern theatre. Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations* (1996) provided a wider understanding of the discussions around the boy players of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. I was fascinated by the way that the boy players in the Early Modern theatre were perceived by the audience. The Anti-Theatricalists saw the practice of cross-dressed boys as a moral threat, but the convention was readily accepted by contemporary theatre-goers. At Shakespeare's Globe, the 'Original Practices' productions have experimented with cross-gender performances raising very current discussions about the nature and perception of gender by contemporary audiences and performers. *Shakespeare Redressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance* (2008) edited by James C. Bulman, explores some of these debates and is significant in terms of the importance of the visual perception of cross-gender casting and what it means to a contemporary audience.

Gender, in terms of sexuality, has not been a primary concern, but rather its connection with theatrical illusion and the uncertainty of visual transformation. Sarah Gorman's article 'The Theatricality of Transformation' (2008) emphasised the

state of transition and transformation inherent in the cross-dressed actors on the Early Modern stage. Gorman talks of: ‘...transformative identities’ that are ‘not transitional states to be passed over and resolved but the centrally spectacular aspects of the plays themselves as the actor is arrested in a state of potentiality, always on the verge of transformation.’ This connects very closely with the liminal qualities of the painted figures in this body of work – ‘arrested’ on the threshold between reality and fiction. Stephen Greenblatt’s *Shakespearean Transformations* (1990) also included an interesting examination of the duality of male and female genders: ‘The transformation of gender identity figures the emergence of an individual out of a twinned sexual nature’ (1990, p. 91) – a close correlation with the androgynous figures in my work. Citing Shakespeare’s repeated use of twins in his dramas, Greenblatt goes on to observe that ‘Shakespeare’s most ingenious representation of this twinned gender identity....is in *Twelfth Night*...’ where ‘the exquisitely feminine Viola and the manly Sebastian are indistinguishable...’ (1990, p. 91)

The strong sense of the presence of ghosts that persisted throughout this project was supported by reading on the uncanny and other related themes of allusion, shadows, and hauntings in text, performance and painting. *The Haunted Stage* (2003) by Marvin Carlson, suggested close parallels with my experience at the Globe: ideas of memory, repetition, re-presentation. The theatre, observes Carlson, is ‘deeply involved with memory and haunted by repetition’. (2003, p. 11) Although that repetition breathes new life into the work, it is at the same time haunted by the ghosts of the past. In much of Carlson’s discussions and observations about the ghosts of theatrical performance, I recognised links with my practice: the experience working at the Globe, and the direct influence of Renaissance art on technical approach and subject matter – the notion of ‘ghosting a historical tradition.’ (2003, p. 144)

Nicholas Royle’s *The Uncanny* (2003) and Niamh Dunphy’s *That Dreaded Sight Once Seen: The Art of the Uncanny* (2009) explore the various perceptions and meanings of ‘uncanny’, which proves extremely hard to define, reinforcing the sense of the strange, uncertain, and ambiguous. Royle and Dunphy emphasise the idea of what Royle describes as the ‘peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar’. (2003, p.1) that is pertinent to all images, and specifically to the discussion about fools and fairies in Shakespeare. Both writers refer to Freud’s essay *The Uncanny*

(1919), and Dunphy in particular discusses the significance of the puppet or mannequin, which in combination with first-hand experience in the Globe, directly influenced three paintings in this project: *Puppet and Masks* (2010) (Figure 28), *Make Our Faces Vizards to Our Hearts* (2011) (Figure 27), and *Fool and Puppet* (2010) (Figure 34).

A major focus of research was writing on the new and original Globe theatres. *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (2008) is an invaluable collection of essays and interviews by those active in the new Globe performance and research. The scope of this book ranges across research and practice, and articulates the relationship with the original playhouse. The observations from actors, costume designers, architects and academic researchers in performance and theatre history demonstrate a dynamic cross-disciplinary project, which closely reflected and connected with my own research.

Investigation into Early Modern theatre history and practice included John H. Astington's *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time* (2010). Particularly relevant is the chapter 'Shadows, Jests and Counterfeits', in which Astington discusses connections between theatrical and painted representations. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while watching the mechanicals' performance, Theseus remarks of the players: 'The best in this kind are but shadows' (5.1.209) and Astington goes on to argue: 'Actors, then, *are* shadows...the word "shadow", however, was also a verb in the sixteenth century, meaning to sketch, to draw, or even to reflect...' (2010, p.31) Astington's discussions about the ambiguous nature of acting are equally relevant to contemporary performance, arguing that the 'pretence' of acting could be seen as an art of untruth, of lying', and that 'there is in fact something uncanny and unsettling about powerful acting' (2010, p. 13). This view connects closely with David Marshall's 'Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' (1982), influential particularly in the comparison of actors to changelings. In this play, states Marshall: 'We watch changelings portray changelings'. (Marshall, 1982, p.569)

Farah Karim-Cooper's *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (2006), and her chapter examining similar matters in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (2008), are historically intriguing and visually evocative in the vivid descriptions of theatrical cosmetics and stage illusions. Of particular

interest was the notion of how the painted face creates uncertainty about the identity and character of the performer, as well as raising questions about ideals of beauty.

Research became increasingly focussed on the parallels between theatre and painting, yet I found little relevant study on this subject. Dominic Johnson's *Visuality and the Theatre* (2012) was pertinent, especially his examination of the power of visual imagery in conveying meaning, in comparison with the spoken word.

I have mentioned earlier the paucity of writing on the visual responses to Shakespeare. Stuart Sillars' books *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic 1720-1820* (2006) and *The Illustrated Shakespeare 1709-1875* (2008) were initially promising but, although providing historical context, proved largely immaterial to this project. Stephen Orgel's essay 'Shakespeare Illustrated' (2007) referred mostly to the same examples, but Jonathan Bate's chapter 'From Character to Icon' in his book *The Genius of Shakespeare* (2008) was the most accessible and applicable to this project, examining the emotional and personal interpretations of Shakespeare's plays that more closely mirrored my own approach. In general, the limited extant research into visual responses to Shakespearean text or performance has emphasised and supported this project's claim to an original contribution to knowledge.

The challenges involved in a project that crosses several different disciplines, as well as involving theoretical and practical sources and methods, prompted consideration of the debates relating to practice-led research. As the number of creative students undertaking practice-led or practice-based doctoral study increases, examination of the problems encountered has consequently expanded. Hazel Smith's and Roger T Dean's *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities)* (2009) presented some interesting analysis, acknowledging the importance of interdisciplinary research, and the relationship between academic research and practice. Smith and Dean state in their introduction that: '...academic research can lead to creative practice. We do not see practice-led research and research-led practice as separate processes, but as interwoven in an interactive cyclic web...' (2009, p. 2) In relation to the central themes and methodological approach of this project, they go on to say: '...any definition of knowledge needs to acknowledge...non-verbal forms of transmission. It must also include the idea that knowledge itself is unstable, ambiguous and multi-

dimensional...' (2009, p.3) These statements are extremely pertinent to the experience of applying and expressing information from diverse sources, and especially in the difficulty of articulating connections and specific influences. In making paintings, or any artwork, much knowledge is indeed ambiguous and multi-dimensional, making definitive conclusions and assertions problematic.

A significant reference was the collection of essays by artists and art theorists in *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* (2013), which greatly informed my attempts to describe the creative process, highlighting the difficulty of and sometimes the disruption caused by verbalising a process that is inherently non-verbal and intuitive: 'To work without knowing where one is going or might end up is a necessary condition of creation...'. (Jones, 2013, p.14)

Methodology

The gathering of research information for this project has been eclectic, driven by the demands of work in progress, with reading running parallel, informing practice indirectly or directly. This body of work is a significant milestone in relation to an understanding of my creative process. My past practice was an instinctive, intuitive and imaginative response to influences of which I was not always even conscious. Motivation and inspiration for subject matter was often personal experiences or miscellaneous textual, literary and visual sources, expressed through a style reminiscent of the Renaissance painters, but I increasingly felt dissatisfaction with purely visual sources. The introduction to the Globe focussed ideas, but also compelled me to more formally examine influences. Time and place became particular, but references and influences became more diverse, demanding a more structured organisation of research. There was, as I gradually discovered, a wealth of related critical writing that supported the development of ideas.

The experience of working at Shakespeare's Globe during my residency had a profound influence on the nature and direction of this project. The initial research proposal stated an intention to expand on previous MA research, using the ambiguity of the cross-dressed figure as a starting point for exploration. Observational and archival research at the Globe stimulated and suggested broader ideas about the connections between theatre and painting and, crucially, prompted specific investigations that were clarified and developed through reading and practice.

For an artist, Shakespeare's Globe is an extraordinarily rich source of visual inspiration from performances, costume and, importantly, the architecture. The theatre's auditorium is a stimulating and distinctive space. The galleries, ornately decorated stage, backstage and gentlemen's rooms resemble a series of compositional frames. The experience of watching rehearsals in the auditorium inspired much wider possibilities and prompted a broadening of themes, compelling me to examine critically how I could express, on a two-dimensional surface, ideas that had been stimulated by my observations.

At Shakespeare's Globe much of my visual research was first-hand observation using sketches and photography. Ideas were explored initially through drawing, from which compositions for paintings were developed. This material was documented chronologically in sketchbooks so as to record the creative process as it occurred. (See Appendix 1). The drawings made from direct observation of rehearsals were a combination of quick, immediate sketches recording and annotating a figure, movement, position, or costume. At the same time, I would sketch compositional ideas as they suggested themselves. The sketches made in these circumstances by necessity took the form of visual 'notes' – it was not possible to make and develop detailed drawings, as I wanted to capture and record figures who were often in almost constant motion. Some sketches were further developed in sketchbooks in the studio using drawings and photography as reference, but also employing memory and imagination for developing ideas for substantial compositions.

When permitted, I also took photographs in the auditorium and elsewhere in the theatre. (See Appendix 2). Photography is obviously useful as an instant record, but also as a memory tool for ideas that may not have been sufficiently documented or explored in sketch books. Photographs are also invaluable for more detailed reference, for costume (alongside reproductions of Tudor and Jacobean portraits and other references from the Early Modern period), details of colour, decorative elements and structure of the theatre and figures' position within the space that later, in the studio, serve as aids to memory. Other visual information may be necessary; for instance specific poses and details of a figure's face or hands may be found from secondary visual sources. But I also have often recruited family and friends as models (for example, in this body of work, my nephew became 'Fleance') and have built up an extensive archive of such photographic references. As I discuss later, I

need my characters to be believable, to have substance and presence, and the realism of accurate representation of the figure contributes to this credibility. But these models are solely used as references – their individual characteristics are adjusted to retain anonymity. Individual recognition would detract and distract from the overall sense of ambiguity, which is so central to this work. The use of contemporary models and other first-hand visual sources, together with reference to 16th and 17th century imagery and language, is also another example of the conflation of past and present which is a fundamental part of negotiating this project.

As well as the auditorium, I photographed and made drawings in the Original Practices costume store, and the extensive props store. These drawings are more refined – the inanimate subjects made more sustained concentration possible. I was particularly struck by the puppets – both on stage and those I found in the props store – which connected with ideas of illusion and the liminality of the threshold between real and imagined, actual and artifice.

Once back in the studio, and once the painting is begun, pictorial concerns take precedence. The composition, the balance and position of the various elements are the primary concern. Various physical references are combined with creative imagination and creative memory. When making a painting, sometimes there is complete certainty, at other times much experimentation and hesitation, pausing to find additional visual or verbal information before a solution is found. This liminal state of ‘not knowing’ is explored in more depth in the Epilogue.

The ultimate stage is the exhibition, and it is always fascinating to discover how one perceives the paintings when they are hung for the show. I discuss later the experience of finishing a painting, how that intimate and intense relationship abruptly ends; the paintings subsequently disappear for a while to the framers, creating an emotional and temporal distance. Hanging a group of paintings prompts a fresh evaluation – seeing how the images relate to each other, and how an often unexpected collective dynamic is produced. The exhibition, ‘Within This Wooden O’, was held in an unconventional and perhaps awkward space, which again influenced the way that the paintings could be viewed. The space is in effect a corridor leading off a circular central area, which forms the entrance to the main Globe Exhibition, passed through by the many daily visitors. The Exhibition comprises historical artefacts, costumes, information presented conventionally and

digitally about the original Globe, the inspiration for and the challenges of building the new theatre, about musicians and actors and, of course, about Shakespeare. Like every other aspect of Shakespeare's Globe, the Exhibition is a synthesis of past and present. In this environment, the characters or players portrayed in the paintings - which could be now or could be then - express that temporal ambiguity, that fusion of old and new.

The written journals contain a chronological record not only of thoughts, reflections and observations, but also extensive notes on reading material and other verbal sources. The outcomes are visual, but the development of images crosses several disciplines. Influences are direct and indirect; historical research suggests contexts and narratives and merges with observational sources to influence subject and composition. Critical reading prompted interrogation of concepts, suggested wider meanings and interpretations of performance and texts. And other, less direct but frequent and sometimes subliminal influences include theatre performances (beyond the Globe), film and television adaptations of Shakespeare or related historical subjects and historical fiction. These diverse stimuli are sometimes but not always directly manifested in the imagery, but create a greater awareness of contextual connections and historical background.



Figure 5: 'Within This Wooden O': Solo exhibition by Rosalind Lyons, Globe Exhibition 2012



Figures 6 & 7: 'Within This Wooden O': Solo exhibition by Rosalind Lyons, Globe Exhibition 2012

Attending and participating in various conferences and symposia and other research events was crucial in enabling me to place my practice and this project broader contexts. Events organised by Shakespeare's Globe, the British Shakespeare Association, King's College, London as well as my own university presented a breadth of research either directly about Shakespeare or exploring areas relevant to the project, and were invaluable in gaining an understanding of existing ideas and suggesting future direction. At the British Shakespeare Conference in Cambridge in 2011, I gave a joint presentation with artist Tom de Freston who has explored Shakespearean tragedy in his work. Although both concerned with Shakespeare, our imagery and concerns differ; de Freston's paintings in that presentation referred to current political issues explored through Shakespeare's texts, presenting an example of the wide range of possible responses and interpretations. The exchange of approaches and ideas, shared aims and interests was extremely important, stimulating critical consideration of the nature of my images, and thoughts on whether intentions had been successfully realised and conveyed. Other influential events included the 'Gesture Lab' symposium at the Globe (2010), notable primarily because it highlighted the Globe's approach in combining practice and theory, with which I particularly identify. Speakers at this symposium included actors, directors and academics, historians and those researching theatrical effects and conventions. This experience clarified and supported my developing interest in the performer and the liminal aspects of performance.

Other influential research events and papers included a colloquium on transhistoricism, which connected with the influence of past and present on my own practice; a symposium on Jacobean indoor playhouses in which papers on the structure and lighting of the early theatres were of particular relevance. An interdisciplinary conference exploring 'Fantasy and Myth in Literature and the Arts' (2013) at Anglia Ruskin University presented wider ideas connected with storytelling, the supernatural and the uncanny. In my own presentation at this event, I focussed on these aspects in my images and research. More recently, I presented a paper exploring the influences of the Globe, Shakespeare and the past on my work at the British Shakespeare Association Conference 'Shakespearean Transformations: Death, Life, and Afterlives' (2016). These experiences have introduced many

fascinating and diverse areas of contemporary Shakespearean research, and reinforced the conviction that my work is firmly situated in this field of study.

The approach to the written component of the thesis was a persistent concern. An important part of this project was to examine my creative process, how the disparate elements and disciplines interrelated. Reflection was an integral aspect, but I wanted to avoid contrived or self-conscious organisation or editing of material.

A crucial feature of artistic activity is intuitive and imaginative thought, unhindered by the limitations of the rational and logical. This serendipitous quality is reflected in the organisation of this commentary, which should be read as a text accompanying the body of work. It is intentionally designed to echo the developmental narrative of the project and the non-linear, multi-layered nature of the creative process, rather than to conform to the conventional format of a traditional doctoral thesis.

The aim has been to create and reflect an interdisciplinary dialogue, and in this approach there are close parallels with the 'bricolage' research method. The direct translation of the French word 'bricoleur' means a jack-of-all-trades, and in academic spheres 'bricolage' has been used to describe a pragmatic and eclectic approach to qualitative research. In 'Piecing Together—A Methodological Bricolage' (2008), Ainslie Yardley states that: 'The researcher is seen here as a bricoleur, a maker of patchwork, a weaver of stories; one who assembles a theoretical montage through which meaning is constructed and conveyed', and goes on to describe the problems that emerged when employing an unconventional format for presenting her research:

The advice that researchers are given again and again is to narrow down their research question, to be specific, to stay on the main methodological and theoretical thoroughfare and resist going down those fascinating cross-disciplinary side roads. If it's not obviously on point or in the right theoretical domain, researchers are told—Let it go! As we all know, those fascinating side roads and intuitive diversions often lead somewhere important, however obscure the route might seem in the beginning. Why let them go? Why not pinpoint them on the philosophical map, find which line on which they belong and make the connections? (Yardley, 2008)

The visual and the verbal intertwine and overlap, and this means allowing and recognising connections, associations and alliances. These alliances involve a sense of the presence of the past, the inherent ambiguity of Shakespeare's plays and characters, the visual allusions to the Renaissance and Elizabethan England, to boy players playing girls playing boys, to the intricacies and extravagance of costume or the ethereal shimmer of candlelight on a white-painted face. It is the interweaving of silent words - the 'language locked beneath' (Pinter, 1999, p.23) and visual quotation, of echoes, of ghosts, of shadows, of something sensed rather than known - 'that is, and is not' (Twelfth Night V,i,213), the transience of performance and the illusory elusiveness of real and imagined memory. Ideas and thoughts meander and drift, sometimes digressing then connecting to create further alliances that may seem logical, but might appear surreal or enigmatic. Ultimately, I encountered in the commentary not only problems raised by my limitations as a writer, but also the constraints and regulations regarding traditional research theses.

A research project in painting is especially appropriate in addressing the fundamental questions posed and explored in this thesis. The painted image can present and encourage unconventional perspectives, suggest layers of meaning, some intended by the artist and others that emerge through the diverse and individual responses of the viewer. One viewer remarked that *Puppet and Masks* reminded them of Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, perhaps because of the dress, or the patterned floor, introducing an unanticipated perspective and association. Another comment on paintings from a previous exhibition was that the paintings were like a collection of ghosts, which was satisfying, suggesting that the painted figures could have once lived. Painting plays with time and space; it can elicit associations and memories, and evoke narratives and stories. In *What is Painting?* (1999), Julian Bell observes that there are: '...small-scale, private stories....and there are large-scale communal stories....All these stories, whatever their relation to the truth, open up shapes for time.' (1999, p.90) He goes on:

'We see a painted figure - marks on a surface....the figure inhabits a potential story, a form of time...We - painter or viewer - begin to imagine what the figure is doing, we begin to wonder within which story in our memory it

might resonate...And often the story a figure inhabits is more important, in our imagination, than the space it inhabits.’(1999, p. 90-91)

Painting is a uniquely effective medium for expressing the uncertainty, the unease, the indefinite, the multidimensional and the multisensory. Painting can appear to represent and define, but simultaneously rejects definition or explanation.

In *Visuality and the Theatre* (2012), Dominic Johnson discusses Roland Barthes’ view that the ability of an image ‘to produce meanings for the spectator...are complex and often difficult to disentangle...images are magical, extreme or otherwise dysfunctional, especially when compared with the more straightforward fashion in which written words may disclose their meanings’. (2012, p. 19) This project is about thresholds and boundaries: boundaries in the context of the liminal qualities of both theatre and painting, but also the thresholds and connections between visual art, literature, history and performance. These disciplines have become over the course of this project not just influences, but areas of study that themselves form an integral part of my practice. The painted image in its ambiguous and enigmatic complexity is able to encompass the influences of, and allusions to, diverse interdisciplinary sources of reference.

Contribution to knowledge

Much has been written about how Shakespeare has been adapted and appropriated in film, music, fiction, poetry and popular culture, but art often seems marginalised in these discussions. Visual responses to Shakespearean drama in the field of Fine Art in the last 150 years have been scarce. Research into Shakespeare-related imagery has been largely in the form of critical surveys of painters and illustrators who have been inspired or influenced by Shakespeare, and these have chiefly been confined to visual representations from the 18th and 19th century. The images examined by Stuart Sillars in his two books *Picturing Shakespeare: the artist as critic 1720-1820*, and *The Illustrated Shakespeare 1709 – 1875* are concerned almost exclusively with literal portrayals of scenes from the plays either directly derived from Shakespeare’s text or from specific theatrical performances, and frequently, as in Hogarth’s *David Garrick as Richard III* (1745), take the form of portraits of famous actors in

Shakespearean roles. Painters of this time, such as those whose work was exhibited in John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, which opened in 1789, were perhaps too constrained by the strict traditions and conventions of the fine art genre, and tended to approach Shakespeare from the standpoint of history painting, while in the Victorian era painters and illustrators created often sentimentalised images from the plays. A principal exception was Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), who expressed an emotional response to Shakespearean text and performance. In the chapter 'From Character to Icon' in his book *The Genius of Shakespeare* (2008), Jonathan Bate argues that Fuseli '...goes beyond stage representation and seeks to take Shakespeare directly into the imagination. (2008, p. 269)

Some illustrators have created powerful and evocative images responding directly to Shakespearean texts and characters, notably Edmund Dulac's illustrations of *The Tempest* (1908), Edward Gordon Craig's *Hamlet* woodcuts (1928), and the idiosyncratic images of contemporary illustrator Edouard Lekston. I have discovered very few contemporary fine artists who have made more than a fleeting exploration of Shakespearean drama in their work. There are some who have touched on Shakespeare: painter Lisa Wright and photographer Tom Hunter are among artists commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company to create work in response to their productions. During a residency at the RSC Lisa Wright observed rehearsals and performances of Shakespeare's epic cycle of history plays. Her expressive paintings and charcoal drawings convey strongly the visual drama of players within theatrical space. Tom Hunter cites Fuseli as an influence in his series of photographs based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and sets his images in contemporary London. Only one that I have found, Tom de Freston, has made a more sustained investigation and in-depth exploration of the relationship between Shakespearean text and image, including an examination of the theme of tragedy in painting in his fractured and often disturbing images.

In other media, there is currently a strong preoccupation with the past, and particularly the Tudor and Jacobean periods. Novelists Hilary Mantel, Philippa Gregory, and C. J. Sansom have achieved popular and critical acclaim in their fictionalisation of the 16th century, and lavish period productions on television and film, frequently adaptations of Shakespeare, consistently attract huge audiences. However in contemporary fine art, there seems to be a general aversion to producing

work that might directly refer to a historical tradition, unless in a passing reference or in the form of a cynical pastiche. Some artists have alluded to or have been obviously influenced by 16th and 17th century artists in their approach, playing with visual and conceptual motifs from art history, but none have been concerned so specifically with a sustained investigation into Shakespearean theatre.

Furthermore, through analytical engagement with my interdisciplinary practice, this work presents an original critical investigation into the relationship between theoretical influences and creative process. Unlike the terms ‘interdisciplinary’, or ‘multidisciplinary’ in Fine Art, which are generally used to describe work which combines different media, my research is fundamentally cross-disciplinary, involving research into English literature, drama, cultural history as well as art history and criticism. My principal references and influences are largely outside the field of the visual arts; the themes with which I am concerned I have found most explored in English literature and writing on theatrical performance, and in Shakespearean criticism - another aspect of my work rarely shared by other artists.

This body of work does not aim to translate or illustrate Shakespeare’s text, or to replicate a theatrical performance in a painting – the depth and complexity of ideas stimulated by my experience at Shakespeare’s Globe and wider research demanded more nuanced expression - but to explore links between the media with regard to creativity, illusion, and the creation of a fictional but credible world. I am interested in a lateral and imaginative response to themes and narrative: Shakespearean text, characters and performance are starting points for a broader investigation into layers of meaning and shifting perspectives in theatrical and pictorial space. There is a link with ekphrasis (a literary description of, usually, a visual work of art) although my work could be more accurately described as reverse ekphrasis. Rather than a description of work in another creative form, these paintings convey in a purely visual medium a perception of the liminality of theatrical space, the ambiguity of performance and an evocation of textual allusions and influences. I am not only concerned with the translation and influence of the text, in the visual representation of the figure in theatrical space, but also in how ideas of ambiguity, liminality and transformation in performance can be expressed through painting. Fine art, even performance art, has not dealt in depth with these connections in any context.

But importantly, the research is inspired by and firmly rooted in the Globe theatre both present and original, which embodies the principal themes in my work. To my knowledge no other painter, or artist, has made such a sustained original creative and critical investigation into the Globe theatre, past or present. In the introduction to *Shakespeare's Globe: a Theatrical Experiment* (2008), Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper state that: 'What this theatre has offered up to the scholarly community is a real understanding of the possibilities of practical experiments that are historically and critically informed.' (2008, p. 9). My practice connects closely with this ethos – a contemporary perspective strongly influenced by the ghosts of the past, informed by historical and critical research, but also, as a transhistorical exploration of liminality and ambiguity, self-consciously reflects on the implications of references from the past.

As described above, an important feature of research gathering was attendance at and participation in several conferences, symposia and other research events. This experience was instrumental not only in identifying a context for my practice and research, but crucially in situating this PhD project in the particular sphere of Shakespeare studies. The impulse to re-work and re-imagine Shakespeare shows no signs of diminishing; there are parallels in my practice with the literary theory of adaptation and appropriation, and with contemporary creative reception of Shakespeare. It is in this field and that of Shakespearean 'afterlives' that these paintings and this project are placed, and where I assert an original contribution to knowledge.

‘In scorn of nature, art gave lifeless life’

(*Lucrece* 1374)

In the course of this project I have sought other artists who have engaged with Shakespeare, but have discovered few examples of contemporary visual responses to Shakespearean drama. As I have observed earlier, research in this area is limited. The paintings, illustrations and engravings examined by Stuart Sillars in his books *Picturing Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic 1720-1820* (2006) and *The Illustrated Shakespeare 1709 – 1875* (2008) are concerned with representing scenes from plays using text or specific performances as reference. Jonathan Bate, in the chapter ‘From Character to Icon’ in his book *The Genius of Shakespeare* (2008) and Stephen Orgel’s essay ‘Shakespeare Illustrated’ (2007) cover similar ground. But although many of the paintings and engravings examined in these studies do perhaps act as valuable historical records of literary illustration and performance, I do not share Stuart Sillars’ view that some 18th and 19th century paintings provide an insightful critical reading of the plays. However, there are some significant instances where Shakespeare’s dramatic intensity is conveyed through powerful personal interpretation. The Shakespeare paintings of Henry Fuseli, John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* (1851-2), John Singer Sargent’s *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889) and the work of contemporary illustrator Edouard Lekston are notable examples of emotional and intuitive responses with which I particularly identify.

Jonathan Bate describes the paintings of Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), as:

...declarations of the power of feeling in Shakespeare’s plays...Fuseli believed that Shakespeare was “the supreme master of passions and ruler of our hearts” by virtue of his unique intuition into “the spontaneous ebullitions of nature.” (Bate, 2008, p. 267)

The images are indeed powerful; unlike most of his contemporaries, Fuseli managed to express the drama of both text and theatrical production in his often dark and disturbing paintings and drawings. In *Lady Macbeth Seizes the Daggers* (1812) (Figure 8), Fuseli employs chiaroscuro to emphasise emotional and psychological

tension. The scene is strongly theatrical but Fuseli refines the elements to the essential. We see only Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, depicted as almost nightmarish, supernatural characters, surrounded by darkness. Stuart Sillars states that Fuseli's *Macbeth* images 'explore and magnify the driving forces of the plays with an intellectual energy both innovative and compelling' (2006, p. 220).

In the Victorian era Shakespeare's popularity resulted in often sentimental and romanticised images from the plays. There were, however, significant exceptions, such as John Everett Millais' haunting *Ophelia* (1851-2) (Figure 9). Millais was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists who were much influenced by the Romantic tradition in poetry and literature and produced several paintings inspired by Shakespeare. One significant characteristic of the Brotherhood was an interest in creating naturalistic images that conveyed intensity of emotion, (Christian, 2003) and the death of Ophelia was an ideal subject.

Millais' painting refers closely to the text, depicting Ophelia lying drowned in a stream or 'brook' surrounded by meticulously rendered plants and flowers. The painting is powerful in its evocation of her tragic downfall, driven to madness and death by grief, Hamlet's rejection and the machinations of the court. Bate argues that the painting 'transforms a complex dramatic character into a simple but memorable icon. It fixes an Ophelia in the imagination... It may itself offer a strong reading of Shakespeare' (1998, p. 266).

John Singer Sargent's monumental *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, painted a few decades later in 1889 (Figure 10), is about ambition and an intense obsession with power. Like many other Shakespeare related paintings of the 18th and 19th century, it is a portrait of an actress in a Shakespearean role, but it is also the portrait of one of the most notorious characters in Shakespeare: a woman who exhorts her husband to 'screw your courage to the sticking place' (*Macbeth* I.vii.61) and murder the King for his - and her - own advancement. In this monumental and intensely theatrical image that depicts Lady Macbeth holding up the King Duncan's crown, both actress and character exude a sense of formidable force and determination. Sargent's *Lady Macbeth*, as well as Millais' *Ophelia* and Fuseli's *Macbeth* images demonstrate an insightful perspective on character and play.



Figure 8: Henry Fuseli, *Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers* (1812)



Figure 9: Sir John Everett Millais, *Ophelia* (1851-2)



Figure 10: John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (1889)

The idiosyncratic images of contemporary illustrator Edouard Lekston are especially distinctive, demonstrating a personal and perceptive response to text and character (Figures 11 and 12). Lekston is unusual in his sustained reference to Shakespeare, producing several series of drawings in response to the plays. As I have observed earlier, Lekston's approach, the manner in which he develops ideas inspired by Shakespeare, resonates closely with my own experience. Pascal Drouet states that 'Lekston's...aim is not to tell the story narrated by Shakespeare's texts but rather to channel his own emotional response, one often focused on single moments or remarks, into striking imagery' (2013, p. 207). In discussing his series of drawings under the title *Mon Ami William* (2001) Lekston describes his initial impetus: 'As I was reading the plays, I was particularly struck by some passages and pictures came to my mind almost instantaneously. Words give birth to images. This is how it works with me'. (2013, p. 212).

Shakespeare -related imagery has historically often been illustrative representations of stage plays or actors, but the examples examined in this chapter present a more nuanced response to Shakespearean text and performance; there is a sense of narrative, of layers of meaning, the images offer a wide range variety of possible perspectives. The starting point for all is Shakespeare, whether it be text or performance, but from that these artists present a personal and imaginative response and, in the cases of Lekston and Fuseli, an unusually enduring creative relationship with Shakespeare. Although some contemporary work discovered through research was interesting in terms of subject matter, none was specifically influential or relevant to this project. Again, the scarcity of contemporary visual response to Shakespeare is evident.

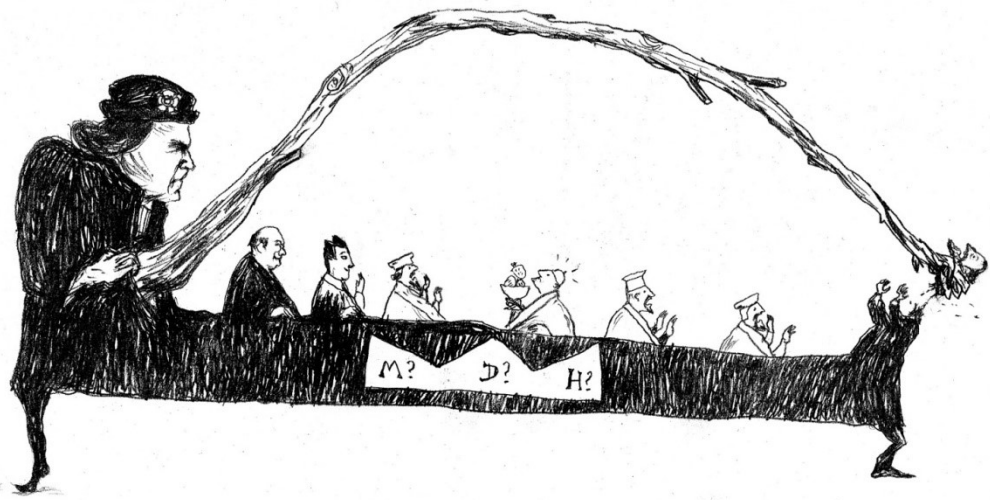


Figure 11: Edouard Lekston. *Drawing from RIII The Family Gathering*. (2007/8)
(Image reproduced with permission of Edouard Lekston)



Figure 12: Edouard Lekston: *Drawing from Mon Ami William Part II:*
Ce que le fou dit à Lear (2001)
(Image reproduced with permission of Edouard Lekston)

‘Figuring the nature of the times deceased’

(*Henry IV, Part 2* III.i.81)

One passage articulates perfectly my feeling about the relationship with, and perception of, the past in my practice: in the introduction to *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Stephen Greenblatt states:

I began with the desire to speak with the dead....for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living. Many of the traces have little resonance, though everyone, even the most trivial or tedious, contains some fragment of a lost life; others seem uncannily full of the will to be heard. It is paradoxical of course to seek the living will of the dead in fictions, in places where there was no live bodily being to begin with. But those who love literature tend to find more intensity in simulations – in the formal, self-conscious miming of life – than in any of the other textual traces left by the dead, for simulations are undertaken in full awareness of the absence of life they continue to represent, and hence they may skilfully anticipate and compensate for the vanishing of the actual life that has empowered them...

(Greenblatt, 1990, p.1)

My work could certainly be said to be haunted by the ghosts of the past, in particular those remote and rather aloof subjects of the 16th and 17th century portraits. Although they often have a name, the characters of the sitters in these portraits, details of their lives and the world that they inhabited are made mysterious and remote by the distance of time. The paintings contain, as Greenblatt states, ‘some fragment of lost life’ (1990, p.1) that arouses curiosity. The figures in my paintings have been compared to ghosts; a view that implies, apart from an echo of a past time, something unreal and unearthly. Greenblatt says that he finds ‘more intensity in simulations’ (1990, p.1); in my images, the figures in the Globe paintings are conceived as actors, but whether actually assuming a character in performance or being their actual selves, is not clear. They are not consciously based on characters

from a play, and so are not really ‘simulations’ in the sense that I think Greenblatt intends – they are fictional in that they are imagined.

How historical references and influences can be expressed and interpreted through pictorial representation has been a fundamental concern in this project. T. S. Eliot in his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ argues that tradition:

...involves in the first place, the historical sense.....and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence...This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. (Eliot, 1919)

The visual echoes in my work, the direct references to 16th and 17th century painters, are expressions of this timelessness, acknowledging and representing the presence of the past. They contribute to the sense of ambiguity, a resonance similar to that created by literary allusions.

I have mentioned the impact of Renaissance artists on my painting style and technique, and there are other artists whose work has alluded to or has been obviously influenced by 16th and 17th century artists. Tom Hunter acknowledges the influence of Vermeer on the lighting and composition of his photographs (Hunter, 2012), and others have appropriated or reworked specific images; for instance Francis Bacon’s *Study after Velasquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953). In my work, I am not borrowing specific images, but following a style of painting that is broadly termed ‘traditional’, in terms of medium and technique. But the reason for fine artists’ apparent reluctance to tackle Shakespearean drama is not easy to determine; it may be perceived as insufficiently obscure, too ‘traditional’, or simply too ‘old’, and there is perhaps a disinclination to engage with literature or literary references in a way that would be categorised as ‘Illustration’ rather than ‘Fine Art’, and so perceived to demonstrate insufficient intellectual rigour. However, in other media there is evidence of an enduring preoccupation with history, especially the Tudor and Jacobean periods. Novelists and film-makers seem more willing than artists to engage with the past: Hilary Mantel’s fictionalised biography of Thomas

Cromwell, and C. J. Sansom's series featuring the Tudor lawyer Matthew Shardlake are consistent best-sellers. On television and film lavish period productions continue to be fashionable, notably the recent adaptation of Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and films *Elizabeth* (1998) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). Re-imaginings and re-inventions of Shakespeare are frequently presented on stage and screen and show no signs of diminution in popularity or accessibility, and yet I have discovered very few contemporary fine artists who have made a sustained enquiry into Shakespearean drama.

It is impossible for an artist to work in a vacuum. We must, whether intentionally or unconsciously, be subject to historical influences that affect our perceptions. In the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' T S Eliot argues that:

No poet, no artist of any sort, has his complete meaning alone.

His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead....what happens when a new work is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it. (Eliot, 1919)

I feel the truth of this statement acutely - that an affinity, a sense of connection with an image or work of art is valid whether that art was created thousands of years ago, or yesterday.

Early Renaissance painters, notably Piero della Francesca, Botticelli, and Mantegna, have been a consistent influence. To me these paintings conjure memories of Italy, cool interiors of medieval and Renaissance churches, a strong sense of history, of ghosts. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) describes the frescoes of Giotto in the Florentine church of Santa Croce as being part of the memory of the building, part of the fabric of history (1972, p.19). But they are also about story-telling, about drama and passion, and the evocation of another world. There is a purity, a naïve candour about those early paintings. Unlike much contemporary art, these images have the universal accessibility of fairy tales, of children's stories. The paintings are things of beauty, not to confuse or challenge, but to inform and entrance. I am attracted by the delicately refined brushwork, the use of translucent

glazes, colours that are often subdued, or faded with age, yet still retain an intensity. In Piero's work, and that of other Italian Renaissance artists such as Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Masaccio, the architectural structure of the compositions suggests theatre, a direct influence when developing images using the architecture of Shakespeare's Globe (Figures 13 and 14). In my Globe paintings, compositional elements such as drapery and pillars are taken directly from the present theatre, but also allude to those elements and compositional devices frequently used in 17th century portraits.

These connections represent a dialogue inherent in the process and evolution of my practice. The influences inform but also reflect and are directed by, the development of my paintings. The recurrence of the cross-dressed figure, for example, instigated research into criticism and discussion of gender in Shakespearean text and performance. And as my technique has become more refined, my references widen accordingly. A broader tonal range and the use of chiaroscuro create a sense of depth, the softening of edges and lines, and more accurate three-dimensional representation of figures and other compositional elements prompted an examination of the technique of Velasquez, Caravaggio and Van Dyck.



Figure 13: Masaccio, *The Nativity* (1470-5)



Figure 14: Piero della Francesca, *The Trinity* (1425-8)

This development is very much affected by my access to a primary source of observational research at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. The experience of working from life rather than two-dimensional references, usually reproductions, has had a significant effect on the quality of the resulting images, for example *Cesario and Olivia* (Figure 39) and in the Globe exhibition paintings, notably *It is But a Shadow's Shadow* (Figure 37) and *Fool and Puppet* (Figure 34). I will discuss the experience of working at the Globe and its effect on my practice in more depth later, but an important challenge was that of expressing the theatrical space within the contained two-dimensional pictorial space of a painting. Reflecting on previous work, I was struck by how many images seemed to be somehow trapped or confined within the space. This compelled consideration of the use of space, and particularly to develop confidence in employing empty or so-called 'negative' space in a composition. In attempting to explore and resolve this issue, certain images were influential, especially Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat*, (1793), John Singer Sargent's *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882) (Figure 15) and Diego Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) (Figure 16).

In Sargent's and Velasquez's images there is a powerful sense of theatricality. The figures are grouped and posed within a lofty space which, along with the dramatic use of light and deep shadow, is reminiscent of a theatre stage. There is a narrative, a story to be related in the relationships between the figures and their position in the pictorial space. When devising my own paintings, which are so influenced by performance and the theatre, I feel a close connection with the practice of a playwright, stage director or designer. I am inventing characters, dressing them in appropriate costumes, lighting them, and positioning or choreographing their movements in a space. As theatre director Peter Brook declares: 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.' (*The Empty Space*, 1968, p.1)

The most consistent sources of reference are the English Tudor and Jacobean portraits. I have been attracted to the style and aesthetics of these paintings, and intrigued by the enigmatic subjects.



Figure 15: John Singer Sargent, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882)



Figure 16: Diego Velasquez, *Las Meninas* (1656-7)

These images convey a strong impression of a staged illusion, a contrived image rather than an honest or revealing portrayal of a person. Nevertheless, they had a particular function in the time they were painted. Neil Cuddy, in his essay 'Dynasty and Display: Politics and Paintings in England, 1530 – 1630' describes the art of this period as: '...predominantly portraits, of sitters surrounded by trappings of wealth, symbols of power, and badges of descent', and argues that the paintings 'are not for art's sake, still less art for God's sake; they are rather art for the sake of power, wealth and lineage – for the sake of dynasty. (Cuddy, 1995)

Now, those symbols and badges are not readily recognised or understood by the 21st century viewer, probably perceived only as obscure decorative devices. So we are left with the subject, stiff and formal, often almost overwhelmed by the exaggerated and elaborately decorated costume and beribboned and bejewelled accessories.

The portraits of Queen Elizabeth I are the most obvious examples of this, for instance *The Phoenix Portrait* (c.1575) (Figure 17). In *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits* (Volume I, 1969) Roy Strong remarks that:

In some cases it seems almost incidental that a particular portrait depicts a human being, so overwhelming is the concern with the trappings of office (armour, batons, coats of arms, inscriptions, complicated dress). The concept of an informal portrait hardly exists apart from the miniature....

(Strong, 1969, p. ix)

This juxtaposition of the naturalistic with the artificial, which perhaps could be seen as incongruous or naive, is I think one of the reasons for the resurgence in the popularity of these paintings, and certainly one reason for my own fascination. There is also the intricate beauty in the detailed rendering of the embroidery and jewellery, and the repetition of decorative pattern, of poses, and often of faces, that is aesthetically beguiling. A favourite example is *The Cholmondeley Ladies* (c.1600-1610) (Figure 18). This portrait depicts two sisters and their babies in which the sisters, costume and poses are almost but not quite identical. With the emphasis on pattern and decoration, the figures resemble ornamental icons rather than individuals. Although the purpose of these paintings was often primarily concerned with status,

there is a sense of something very personal and intimate in these portraits, perhaps partly because, however elaborate and exaggerated the costume, they are exclusively focussed on the human subject without the distracting, ostentatious settings that later became conventional devices in grand portraiture.

In the painting *William Brooke, 10th Lord Cobham and his Family* (1567) (Figure 19) there is again the repetition of faces; the row of children grouped round a table, three adults behind, the usual intricate decoration and pattern, pillars behind, and a decorative plaque with a Latin inscription. This painting certainly conveys the importance of dynasty, depicting a large and healthy family, but is a curious combination of the formal and the domestic. With the advent of the more sophisticated paintings by Velasquez, Van Dyck and others, these 16th century portraits were often considered unfashionable and worthless, and frequently cut down or destroyed (Strong, 1969). However, as Roy Strong observes: ‘It has needed the revolution of aesthetic values effected by twentieth century abstractionism to make us understand the bizarre, lost loveliness of the art of the courts of Elizabeth and James I.’ (Strong, 1969, p.57)

The depiction of faces in these and the continental paintings of the period, has been a key reference for my work. Some, notably Holbein (supported by the preparatory drawings some of which still exist), produced what we imagine is a faithful representation of an individual person, from direct scrutiny of the sitter. But many, for instance the faces of angels and other religious or mythological figures in paintings such as those by Piero della Francesca, suggest an attempt at an embodiment of formal perfection and purity, an air of other-worldliness. The invented figures in my work are similarly idealised and although their faces resemble reality, they lack detailed physiognomy and individual expression. My references are an amalgamation of facial characteristics, sketched or photographed, from real people, or sometimes from photographs or other paintings. In the same way, the Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits are often equivocal; many of these ‘likenesses’ were copies of an original painting, in fact often reproduced over and over again (Hearn, 1995), so that they became ever further removed from the first representation, with inevitable modifications and visual digressions.



Figure 17: (Attributed to Nicholas Hilliard) *The Phoenix Portrait, Elizabeth I* (c.1575-6)



Figure 18: (Anonymous) *The Cholmondeley Ladies* (c.1600-10)



Figure 19: (Anonymous) *William Brooke, 10th Lord Cobham and his Family* (1567)

Here there are close parallels between the role that these references have in the development of my own paintings, and with the nature of the Globe as a primary source. When working at Shakespeare's Globe, I was in a sense copying a copy, a shadow of a shadow – an interpretation of an interpretation. The building itself is a copy, or rather only a best guess at the original: as Andrew Gurr remarks in *Rebuilding Shakespeare's Globe* (1989): 'Given the fragile and fragmentary nature of much of the evidence about the Globe's original design, the reconstruction...must necessarily be regarded as conjectural' (1989, p.42).

These layers of time and meaning and memory create a palimpsestic dialogue both in the theatre and in a painting. In Shakespeare's Globe the performances, supported by research, are re-writing and re-imagining or, like the primary definition of a palimpsest, over writing and redefining the past. In the theatre, even with the tangible link of Shakespeare's language, there is a continuous process of transformation and renewal. In the Foreword to Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997) Gerald Prince states that: 'Any text is a hypertext grafting itself onto a hypotext, an earlier text that it imitates or transforms' (1997, p.ix). This of course is in the very nature of theatre, in that every production of a play is a form of endless repetition. The starting point is the text, which the director, actors and designer have already interpreted, and Shakespeare's text too was frequently an interpretation or response to an existing story. But this implies a diminution – something that loses substance, dwindles ultimately into nothing.

Catherine Silverstone in her essay 'Shakespeare Live: Reproducing Shakespeare at the "New" Globe Theatre' (2005) describes the project at the Theatre as being 'haunted by loss and absence'. The terms 'loss' and 'absence' imply that the venture was anachronous, meaningless or even futile, but this impression is far from my experience at Shakespeare's Globe, which was dominated by a sense of re-discovery and re-imagining, of creative possibilities sparked by investigation into the past. Marvin Carlson discusses the repetitive nature of performance and the significance of memory and experience, observing that theatre is 'the repository of cultural memory, but like the memory of each individual, it is subject to continual adjustment and modification...The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations'. (2003, p. 2)

This repetition, rather than being a series of diminishing shadows, keeps the text, or play - or painting - alive, re-presenting and re-inventing. It is the process of continuous progression and evolution; a creative process, but no less 'real'.

Peter Brook discusses this aspect in relation to representation in the theatre:

A representation is the occasion when something is represented, when something from the past is shown again—something that once was, now is. For representation is not an imitation or description of a past event, a representation denies time. It abolishes that difference between yesterday and today. It takes yesterday's action and makes it live again in every one of its aspects - including its immediacy. In other words, a representation is what it claims to be - a making present. (Brook, 1968, p. 172)

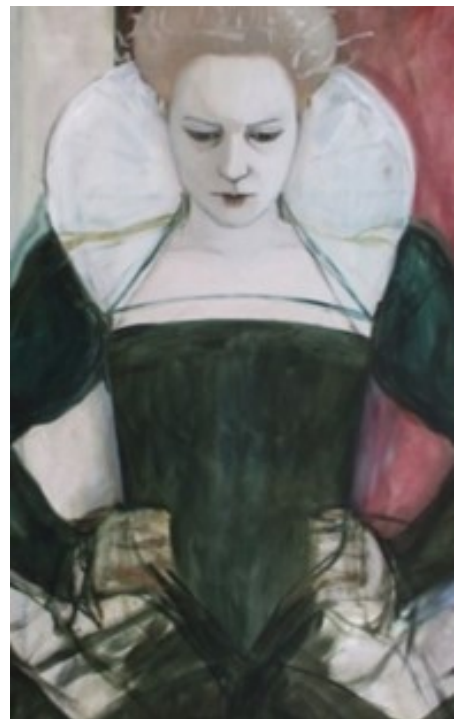
Like the theatre and literature, painting is concerned with allusion, memory, repetition, re-visiting, re-presenting – there are always echoes of what has gone before. But in a painting, the repetition is perhaps more obscure, or indefinable, the references less obvious, but still there in terms of a relationship with an ongoing tradition. A painting though is like a palimpsest in a more literal way – the paint is applied layer upon layer - brushstrokes, forms, colour disappear as they are overpainted or scraped down, constantly revised as the image is developed. John Berger in *Another Way of Telling* (1995) compares the process of drawing and painting with photography, and observes that '...a drawn or painted image is woven together by the energy...of countless judgements...' (1995, p. 93). The process of making a painting is a continuous process of decision-making, and though the evidence of these decisions is mostly hidden, traces still remain, and the completed painting has absorbed not only (I believe) the emotional and intellectual memories of the artist, but also retains a physical record of the visual creative process (Figures 20, 21 and 22).

Marvin Carlson talks of: '...the images of the dead contriving to work their power on the living, of the past reappearing unexpectedly and uncannily in the midst of the present' (2003, p.1). Alice Rayner also considers the ghostliness of theatre in *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*: 'Ghosts...pervade theatre more thoroughly than any particular instance of staging, to the extent that theatre

itself is a ghostly place in which the living and the dead come together in a productive encounter.’ (2006, p. xii). I was especially aware of an interconnectedness, an overlapping of now and then, of real and imagined events when observing the rehearsals and performances in the auditorium. This sense of looking backwards and forwards simultaneously is fundamental in my paintings in terms of style and subject. The painted image creates and represents another level of detachment, instils another layer of ambiguity and separation from reality, and reinforces for me the idea of timelessness, that the past is made present, that these actors could have been part of Shakespeare’s company at the Globe of 1600, waiting to be called onto the stage.

The idea of a space or spaces inspiring imagination and memory is compelling; Carlson observes that ‘...one of the universals of performance...is its ghostliness, its sense of return, the uncanny but inescapable impression imposed on its spectators that “we are seeing what we saw before”’ (2003, p.1). Stephen Greenblatt refers to the ‘textual traces’ of the dead, that ‘make themselves heard in the voices of the living’ (1990, p.1). Perhaps there are visual traces too, that make themselves known in the memory or consciousness of the living.

Although visual memory is often illusive and intangible, connections are made subconsciously, references materialise that are not the result of logical or rational progression: Hilary Mantel, in an article on the writing of *Wolf Hall*, her novel on a period in the life of Thomas Cromwell, discusses her approach to history and fiction and describes the nature of memory: ‘*Wolf Hall* attempts to duplicate not the historian’s chronology but the way memory works: in leaps, loops, flashes’ (Mantel, 2012). This describes well the intuitive and unpredictable nature of the creative process and perhaps too the experience of attending a performance at Shakespeare’s Globe, where there is an often indefinable sensation of connection with the ghosts of the past, a connection made more tangible by the 400-year-old language of the plays. The space, with its series of individual rooms or frames also echoes Guilio Camillo’s design for his Theatre of Memory in the 16th century; the later Memory Theatre of the English Hermetic philosopher Robert Fludd is thought to be directly connected with the original Globe (Yates, 1966).



Figures 20, 21 & 22:
Examples of painting development

The Renaissance memory system, which had its foundations in Ancient Greek mnemonic devices, aimed to improve the mind's ability to memorise. Giulio Camillo, Robert Fludd and Giordano Bruno espoused the theatre as an ideal architectural structure for the storage of memory. And Bruno, a philosopher and poet as well as a mathematician and astrologer, emphasised the power of the imagination. In *The Art of Memory* (1966) Yates states:

For Bruno there is but one power and one faculty which ranges through all the inner world of apprehension, namely the imaginative power or the imaginative faculty which passes immediately through the gates of memory and is one with memory. (Yates, 1966, p.328)

In the context of my practice, it is this notion of memory linked with imagination that is most pertinent – the idea of collective cultural memory as described by Carlson, or collective imagination, which relates closely to my own experiences at the new Globe.

Shakespeare's Globe is a contemporary theatre, but nevertheless has been criticised for being an anachronism, a mere tourist attraction or heritage centre that cannot be seen as making a serious contribution to contemporary theatre. In *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* Pauline Kiernan examines the work at Shakespeare's Globe during its first season. The reconstruction, she states:

... couldn't be anything other than a paradox. It's a theatre for the 21st century built as close as modern scholarship so far could get to the sixteenth century original...It would be strange to have no dissenting voices raised against it in an age when visual and architectural readings of the past have become heritage exercises, deadening and sanitising what was once alive and radical... Do we call it a new theatre? A new/old theatre? A Tudor style playhouse for twentieth century theatrical experimentation? Why an authentically built sixteenth-century structure for actors and audiences of the late second Elizabethan age anyway? (Kiernan, 1999, p. 3)

But far from being an outdated and irrelevant anachronism, actors and directors in the early seasons at the theatre ‘were describing the theatre space as “raw”, “strange”, “exciting”, “energizing”, “dangerous”, “new”, “avant garde”’ (1999, p.3). This aspect of experimental performance has been influenced not only by the building, but by the extensive and accurate research into Early Modern theatrical practices, advised by notable Shakespearean scholars including Professor Andrew Gurr and Professor Alan C. Dessen. Underpinning its conception was the blend of historical theory and practice in the design and materials used in the construction of the building itself, and the use of what the theatre terms ‘Original Practices’ in performance, stage design and costume. There is here a question of the importance of authenticity, and whether that is even possible or desirable to achieve. Catherine Silverstone observes that the extensive research and preparation involved in the Original Practices productions ‘reveal an obsession...with producing a spectacular, pristine past’ (Silverstone, 2005), but Jenny Tiramani, former Director of Theatre Design at the Globe (1997-2005), and actor and former Artistic Director (1995-2005) Mark Rylance both argue that understanding the past can bring a radical new perspective on the approach to performance. In the Original Practices productions, actors and directors worked closely with Shakespearean academics and theatre historians, and costumes were made with close reference to information on designs, fabrics and techniques which might have been used at the original 17th century theatre. It is, however, inevitably a contemporary interpretation as it is impossible to know exactly what the experience of a player or audience would have been in 1600. Jenny Tiramani has a pragmatic view on historical accuracy:

Clearly there is no such thing as authenticity because...we’re not in that world. You could only be truly authentic if you were there. Leading that life, eating that diet, you know, walking down those streets and being paid that pittance for making all those smocks by the morning. So, it’s not authentic in any way, it’s always interpretation, as far as I am concerned. (Quoted in Payton, 2003)

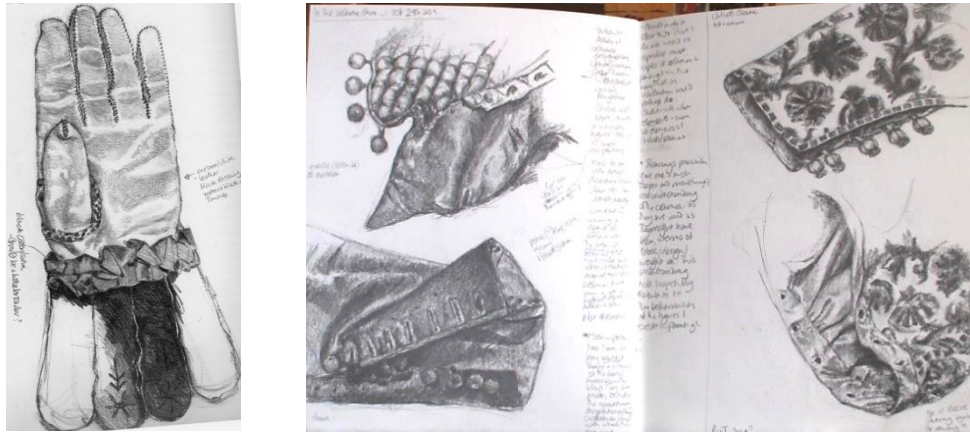
In fiction, writers Hilary Mantel and C. J. Sansom create imagined but entirely believable worlds and characters based on meticulous historical research, even

though the dialogue is certainly modernised. While aiming for authenticity and accuracy in certain aspects of my paintings, I retain a creative flexibility in my interpretation. I have made a close study of Elizabethan and Jacobean costume referring to paintings from the period, specialist costume research (chiefly by Janet Arnold and Jenny Tiramani), as well as making drawings in Shakespeare's Globe's original practice costume archives (Figures 23 and 24). But in my images, a balance has to be achieved between historical accuracy and pictorial concerns. In my paintings, it matters to me that my figures are credible – I need to believe that they could exist in the original Globe, while at the same time could be actors in the present theatre dressed in one of the Original Practices costumes. As historical research has become an increasingly significant aspect of my work, it can, although absorbing, have the effect of creating restrictions when developing a painting. I have to decide how 'authentic' it needs to be in terms of the visual image and whatever meaning I am attempting to express. In *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985) David Lowenthal states that: 'History is persuasive because it is organised by and filtered through individual minds....; subjective interpretation gives it life and meaning' (1985, p.218). A painting is an illusion, a contrived invention, and at some point it is necessary to put the research aside and let pictorial concerns take over – and to succumb to intuitive and 'subjective interpretation'.

Although some of my earlier work could be said to be a pastiche, certainly of Renaissance portraits, I was aware even then that, perhaps paradoxically, I did not want the figures to be associated with a specific historical or contemporary period. I was very conscious of making a copy, or perhaps a better description would be a 21st century adaptation of a 16th century painting. (Figure 25) So there was perhaps an intentional confusion, a deliberate sense of anachronistic incongruity. The subjects of my paintings are unknown: their place, purpose, role is ambiguous. But their anonymity is unsettling. There are clues in the setting, in the costumes – or perhaps I should just say in the clothes they are wearing - but the context is not obvious or defined. Like the subjects of the Renaissance portraits, the figures are mysterious and unknowable, and despite the obvious visual allusions, the fact is that they are being created *now*, and therefore are subject to associations inherent in the perception of the contemporary viewer.

The question of whether a painting can link past and present is one of the principal themes explored in this commentary. It involves fundamental considerations in my practice, my approach to research and in the subject matter and content of the images. The activity of painting, of developing an image, through repetition, allusion and memory, engages in a palimpsestic dialogue. There are layers of influences and references, both contemporary and historical, which are absorbed in the process and distilled in the final image. The painter Marlene Dumas declared that: 'Painting is a very slow art' and that it '...doesn't freeze time. It circulates and recycles time like a wheel that turns.' (Dumas, 2011) Marvin Carlson similarly observes that the ghosts of past experiences '...are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and recollection.' (2003, p.2) Painting embodies this idea of timelessness, of present and past being interwoven, of looking backwards and forwards at the same time. The images not only present the new, but resonate with the traces of the past, with 'some fragment of a lost life'. (Greenblatt, 1990, p.1) Like the new Globe, the paintings capture the past and at the same time invest it with contemporary experience.

The relationship with the past underpins this entire project at every level, and this section has examined visual, theatrical and literary influences on this project, and the challenges of interpreting and expressing historical references. It has also demonstrated the close methodological and philosophical connection between my practice and that of Shakespeare's Globe, a connection never before explored in such depth by a visual artist.



Figures 23 & 24:

Sketchbook drawings from Shakespeare's Globe's Original Practices costume store.



Figure 25: Rosalind Lyons, *Renaissance Profile* (2002)

‘Within this wooden O’

(*Henry V* Prologue.13)

The Globe or indeed any theatre stage is a space of illusion and story-telling. As Sarah Annes Brown puts it in her essay “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Responses to Shakespeare’s Magic in Popular Culture’ (2009) it is a place where there transpire, ‘...magical creative acts with the potential to summon new worlds into existence...’ (2009, p.161). A painting too presents and represents an imaginary world where, as Theseus remarks in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

...imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown.
(*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* V.i.14-15).

Shakespeare frequently stresses the power of imagination and invention: in the prologue to *Henry V*, the Chorus asks the audience to use their imagination to visualise the epic tale that is to be played out within the limitations of ‘this wooden O’:

...Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may
Attest in a little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
....Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
(*Henry V*, Prologue. 11-23)

This notion of a place of imagination and memory supports the concept of the Globe’s liminality and ambiguity. In that space memory, real or imagined, fuels and inspires the re-invention and re-presentation of the stories and language of the past,

gives them a new relevance. Walter Raleigh (c.1552-1618) in his poem *On the Life of Man* (Latham, 1965, p.56) likened the tiring house (the original term for the backstage and dressing areas at the theatre) to a womb, but this analogy could be applied to the auditorium, or the building as a whole: the analogy suggests a place of creation, and also an embracing, inclusive space. It is a place of suspended reality – when I walk through the doors and enter that circular space, the outside world recedes, almost disappears. Even the sound of sirens and planes seem disconnected. The sensation of collective collusion, of shared and enthusiastic involvement, is enthralling. The nature of the architectural design means that the so called ‘fourth wall’, the invisible barrier between audience and players, does not exist. Pauline Kiernan observes:

There is no physical or psychological dividing line between the playgoers and the players...the sharing of the same light in the physical configuration of stage and auditorium at the new Globe challenges many of our assumptions about the playing space and the space of the audience...(1999, p.4-5)

W B Worthen in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (2003) discusses the role of the audiences at the Theatre: ‘Globe performance strikes its difference from conventional contemporary Shakespeare by involving the audience energetically in a participatory engagement with the space and with the performance’ (2003, p.101). Similarly, Mark Rylance describes the ‘spirit’ of the new Globe as ‘visceral’ (2008, p. 112).

There is a rawness, an edge about theatre, especially in the Globe; an unrefined directness. That immediacy can make one feel uncomfortable – perhaps it is when a performance, an actor physically, psychologically, emotionally crosses the boundary between stage and audience, and between fiction and fact – when we in the audience are suddenly (and perhaps only momentarily) unsure as to quite where we are. Peter Brook, in his collection of essays *The Empty Space* (1968) describes theatre as ‘the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity’ (1968, p.122). Mark Rylance, in describing the experience of performing at Shakespeare’s Globe, talks of a ‘sense of dialogue with the audience’, and observes that:

...one often had the feeling as a player that the consciousness of the audience as a whole was larger than the consciousness of any individual audience member or actor. This is where the Globe's spirit as a building comes into play. The sacred geometry of the architecture generates a particular collective spirit in the people gathered. (Rylance, 2008, p.109)

This is very different from the experience of looking at a painting; the relationship between image and viewer is intimate and private. A painting can evoke personal connections or references that are perhaps only sensed, and difficult to articulate or define.

In the Early Modern theatre the spectacle of the elaborately painted theatre and extravagant richly-coloured costumes was a major attraction and now, in a contemporary theatre the visual display can often dominate a production. What we see is just as vital as the language that is spoken in enabling us to fully appreciate and gain meaning from a performance; in fact it is impossible to distinguish the two elements or to favour one over the other. In *Theatre and the Visual* (2012), Dominic Johnson looks at the theorist Roland Barthes' discussion of the differences and similarities in responses to the visual and verbal. Barthes considers the complexity and multiplicity of possible meanings offered by a visual image as compared to 'the more straightforward fashion in which written words might disclose their meanings' (2012, p.19). Johnson continues:

In its complexity, the visual image is particularly prone to surprises of meaning, including the painful effect Barthes calls the 'punctum'....a disturbing, unexpected experience that cannot easily be defined in intellectual terms... (Johnson, 2012, p.19)

This expresses well the problem of articulating a coherent verbal response not only to visual images generally, but especially to one's own work. The response to a visual image is really multi-sensory, subject to continuous change and extremely difficult, sometimes impossible, to adequately express through the limited medium of words. In essence, this is the difference between the visual and the verbal language, between our response to and communication with pictures or words.

Words form sentences, chapters, books; or in plays, scenes, dialogue, an unfolding sequence of events. All these are by nature linear, and all have a beginning, middle and end. In the theatre there is the added element of action – there is movement, gesture, expression - but all these elements are essentially visual. The connection between words and pictures has been a particular preoccupation in this project. I have considered incorporating actual text into the paintings, but felt that it would immediately be a distraction, for me when developing an image and for future viewers; the text would inevitably be seen as some sort of description or explanation of the image. But my response to poetry is more complex than my response to prose, or say a novel. To me, poetry is more abstract, less linear, and I react emotionally rather than intellectually, in much the same way as I respond to music. This is I think at the heart of the influence of Shakespeare on my work – there are passages, lines, phrases, which, although rarely suggesting specific images, induce feelings, sensations, or atmosphere. There are speeches and passages that I frequently do not understand, but I feel are beautiful and evocative. It is perhaps the sound of the words spoken on stage or in my head, but I also see words ‘In my mind’s eye’ (*Hamlet* I,ii,185). T.S. Eliot described the sometimes elusive and indefinable effect of dramatic poetry, which he felt that, to some extent, Shakespeare achieved:

Beyond the classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life.....here is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action....This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity. (Eliot, 1957, p.86-7)

Although, as I have described, I can often identify how images came to be realised, from direct observation, and from literary and visual influences, I do not always know, or cannot articulate the exact relationship between Shakespeare’s words and the images I create. The titles, at least those taken directly from Shakespeare, do indicate this sensory and lateral engagement with the text. Consciously ambiguous, they suggest an association but are equivocal.

Like poetry, there is rhythm in painting. Rhythm can be created by line, by pattern, by colour. All these visual elements create a dynamic that can be, and often has been, compared to music, and can stimulate certain sensations. The awkwardness of an unbalanced or discordant composition can provoke feelings of aversion and irritation which may then repel the viewer and detract from the work of art. The painter and art theorist Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) articulated his emotional associations with particular colours. For instance, pure green, he said, 'is the most restful colour that exists'; and red 'rings inwardly with a determined and powerful intensity' (Kandinsky, 1912). The nature of the brushwork and of mark-making in painting can similarly evoke drama, energy and emotion. In my paintings, the fine draftsmanship, influenced by Renaissance painting, does I believe contribute to an impression of stillness and silence. My approach reflects my intention to create something of substance; slowly and systematically building up an image, from basic compositional sketch, to the application of layers of glazes and detailed rendering of subject and object. The medium of oil paint has a particular potency, an organic richness and depth. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) describes this distinctive quality:

What distinguishes oil painting from any other form of painting is its special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the lustre, the solidity of what it depicts. It defines the real as that which you can put your hands on. Although its painted images are two-dimensional, its potential of illusionism is far greater than that of sculpture, for it can suggest objects possessing colour, texture and temperature, filling a space and, by implication, filling the entire world. (Berger, 1972, p.88-89)

My earlier work was more limited in terms of tonal contrast, more concerned with superficial decoration than depth. The increased use of shadow in recent years emphasises a three-dimensional quality, suggesting a more tangible reality. In *The Roaring Boys* (Figure 26), a large scale composition of four almost life-size figures taken directly from a scene in *Henry VIII*, I was attempting to convey the impact of Henry and a group of courtiers bursting onto the stage disguised and extravagantly dressed for a masque.

The distinction between the dramatic action of performance and the stillness of the painting has emerged as a significant concern in my exploration of the parallels between painting and theatre. In this painting, I encountered the difficulty of expressing the thrill of a dramatic moment in a static two-dimensional image. The vibrant colours, feathers, patchwork, layered costumes and masks were possible to represent, but the energy and exuberance were elements that could not adequately be translated. But, *The Roaring Boys* is – as well as colour, pattern, the repetition of figures – about memory. In its making, I was recalling the experience, of the sound, and movement, and the crowd. To anyone who saw that production, they too will perhaps be reminded of the experience; to others, the painting could suggest perhaps a group of entertainers. The presence of a lute implies at least one musician, and there is a suggestion of a fancy dress party, of theatricality; these are not every day clothes. The confident, almost haughty poses resonate with those in Tudor portraits, but the vibrant colours suggest flamboyance, boisterousness, volubility – characteristics reflected in the title, a 17th century term for ‘a man or boy given to...noisy, riotous or drunken behaviour’ (OED, 2015). The costumes in this painting dominate the composition; like the sitters in Tudor portraits, the figures are subordinate to the elaborate and complex elements of the dress. Gender in terms of sexuality is not a preoccupation in my practice, and most figures in this exhibition are, to varying degrees, ambiguous as to gender. But here they are, though the faces are slightly androgynous, indisputably young men. The exaggerated codpieces are merely another feature of the ostentatious costume of the Elizabethan period, an accessory that seems more ridiculous than impressive to modern audiences. I am interested in gender in terms of theatrical transformation rather than sexuality, and such allusions impose a specific contemporary construct that is immaterial to the concerns of this project. If pressed for a definition, I would describe the figures in my paintings as, mostly, probably, asexual; they are fictions, illusions of the imagination.

Despite the title, these painted figures are still and mute, and perhaps because of the disparity between the source inspiration and the limitations of the two-dimensional painted image, the painting is I feel unsuccessful. Technical issues contribute significantly to this dissatisfaction; the light is too even, too relentless, which together with the vibrant elaborate pattern, gives the eye nowhere to settle.

More varied tonal range would have increased drama and focus. It is a large painting, 120cm x 160cm, and yet is not concerned with conveying theatrical space. *The Roaring Boys* is the only painting in this project depicting a group of figures, but the narrative is uncertain; all have equal presence, the poses are powerful and the gazes challenging but the meaning remains unclear. This image seems to have implications that are at variance with the rest of this series of paintings; it has a different ambiguity. I created it, but I am perplexed and unsettled by it.

This painting more than any other in the exhibition does I think highlight the problem of translating the temporal into the spatial. But, in attempting to depict sequential dramatic action I came to realise that in fact this is not what I am concerned with, at least not literally. I do not think you can represent movement – merely depicting someone in the act of moving is not the same thing. A notable example of this approach is Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), in which the artist directly visualises a specific sequential movement, resulting in an interesting but rather cold, technical experiment. As I have discussed above, mark-making, contrasting tones and textures, the action of painting and the manner in which paint is applied onto the canvas can suggest drama and emotion, and compositional dynamics can create a sense of *visual* movement. A painting cannot convey the passage of time in the conventional linear way but this fourth temporal dimension is the time and experience involved and thoughts that are absorbed by the image during its making. Peter Brook argues that theatre 'always asserts itself in the present.' (1968, p.111) But painting not only asserts itself in the present, it simultaneously encompasses the past.



Figure 26: Rosalind Lyons, *The Roaring Boys* (2012)

Painter Charline von Heyl, argues that:

...a painting insists on its own presence.... That spirit you get from painting is a spirit that is really very difficult to get from anywhere else, because a painting has something about it that is momentous. It is there in a second, but it is also unfolding into different timelines...there are very few things that have both direct impact and this gradual unfolding in the same way as a painting. (Barliant and Turner, 2009, p.46)

As well as physical and dramatic action there is too, crucially, the aspect of the sound of the theatre. Not only the spoken language but also – especially in the Globe theatre – the sound of the movement of the crowd within the auditorium, of the collective aural and oral responses and reactions to the play, and of the outside world; the constant buzzing of cars and aircraft, and the general noisy business of the modern city. In his essay ‘Pictorial Shakespeare: Text, Stage, Illustration’ Jonathan Bate discusses the multi-sensory experience of performance, and remarks that there is ‘...something peculiar about live performance: it offers a place where artwork and audience share not only a spatial and temporal experience, but a sound world. Books and paintings are alike in that they have no sound-worlds....’ (Bate, 2000). This sound-world reinforces the acute awareness of the present, the immediacy of the theatre. In a performance, silence is a powerful yet often disturbing element, infused with feelings of anticipation and apprehension. The playwright Harold Pinter, in a speech to the National Student Drama Festival in 1962, discusses the nature and the nuances of silence:

There are two silences. One where no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear. (Pinter, 1999, p.23)

Pinter’s description of a silence with ‘a language locked beneath it’ is evocative, suggesting clear parallels with the still, mute figures in my work. In the same speech he comments on the ambiguity of language:

So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history. Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration, but which it is compulsory to explore. You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said. (Pinter, 1999, p.22-23)

Here, instead of 'language', read 'visual language' which is essentially superficial and ambiguous - the boundaries between truth and deception are blurred. This description of Pinter's characters resonates strongly with my own invented figures in terms of so much being unspoken, of ambiguity and elusiveness. There is also equivocation: '...below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken': a phrase that sounds rather Shakespearean. I am reminded of Macbeth: 'And nothing is, but what is not.' (*Macbeth* I.iii.142). A painting is of course silent, and the pictorial equivalent to theatrical silence is perhaps stillness. Shakespeare's contemporary Ben Jonson observed that: 'Picture..... is itself a silent worke;Yet it doth so enter, and penetrate the inmost affection...as sometimes to overcome the power of speech, and oratory.' (quoted in Strong, 1969, p.53). Similarly I think there is much power in the stillness of an image – the stillness of space, of subjects or objects frozen in a moment. Niamh Dunphy in *A Dreadful Sight Twice Seen: The Art of the Uncanny* (2009) conveys this sense of tension particularly well in relation to a work by the artist Ron Mueck, *Man in a Boat* (2002). The work is a sculpture depicting a naked man seated in 4-metre-long rowing boat. Dunphy observes: 'The figure is caughtbetween the past and the future... Mueck plays with time, creating tension between the mobility and immobility...The *Man in a Boat* seems to occupy the space between motion and stillness' (2009, p.43).

Some of the subjects in the Globe paintings, for instance those in *Make our Faces Vizards to our Hearts* (Figure 27), *Puppet and Masks*, (Figure 28) and *The Roaring Boys* (Figure 26) stare directly out at the viewer, and to me there is here a significant

and intriguing parallel between painting and theatre. In looking straight at us, these figures bring into doubt fixed definitions of reality and illusion. Like an actor breaching the imaginary 'fourth wall' in the theatre, they demand engagement and recognition.

I have mentioned earlier the unique egalitarian atmosphere of the Globe, where the actors frequently cross the boundary between reality and fiction. One example of this is the Shakespearean convention of the soliloquy, where a character temporarily pauses to step out of the scene. This may take the form of an internal debate, such as happens frequently in *Hamlet*, or when an actor addresses the audience directly to describe or relate, as in the prologue or chorus. In these instances the action is suspended, and the audience and player connect in an intimate and personal exchange. Here there is a close similarity with the experience of engaging with a painting: the awareness of time and place recedes but at the same time there is perhaps an enhanced and acute awareness of the moment, when all are engrossed and arrested in this instant when the verbal or visual language stimulates the senses, emotions and imagination.

Shakespeare's Globe auditorium inspires visual responses because of the architectural aesthetics, but also because it comprises a series of exits and entrances. I am fascinated by the unseen secret spaces in the theatre that exist away from the light and spectacle of performance. Three doors lead off the stage, the central ones to the evocatively named 'discovery space', sometimes employed as an extension of the stage, at other times a back-stage area. There is too the musicians' gallery that can also become part of the performance space. The canopy above the stage is known as the 'heavens' and appropriately decorated with astrological symbols and golden stars. The trap door in the centre of the stage provides access to a cellar and is known as 'hell' (Stern, 2013); sculptures on the two pillars at either side of the musicians' gallery depict the symbolic figures representing the two opposed theatrical elements of comedy and tragedy (Kiernan, 1999). So the stage is metaphorically and physically placed on the threshold between not only reality and fantasy, but between heaven and hell, between this world and another, and represents a space where the combined but opposing dramatic facets of comedy and tragedy coexist.



Figure 27: Rosalind Lyons, *Make These Faces Vizards to Our Hearts* (2011)



Figure 28: Rosalind Lyons, *Puppet and Masks* (2010)

The term ‘meta-theatre’ has various definitions, but one refers to the device of a play within a play, a device often used by Shakespeare. Examples of this are the production of ‘The Mousetrap’ (or ‘The Murder of Gonzago’) staged by the travelling players in *Hamlet* and the mechanicals’ performance in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In a painting, there are similar instances of the use of images within images as a compositional device. In Velasquez’s *Las Meninas* (Figure 16) there is a figure on the stairs in the doorway at the back of the room, as well as a reflection of two figures - presumably the unseen subjects of the portrait being painted - in the mirror on the far wall. In the *Flagellation of Christ* by Piero della Francesca (Figure 29) there are two distinct ‘scenes’, two groups of figures placed theatrically within the composition, one group concerned with the actual flagellation of Christ, and in the foreground, three men stand almost casually engaged in conversation and seemingly unaware of the violent incident taking place close by. These various pictures within a composition imply a much more complicated fictive world than the apparent focus of the painting would suggest. *Las Meninas* fascinates – the longer one looks, the more is discovered, there are other stories, other events that are happening or about to happen, and this painting represents only a fleeting moment. But the *Flagellation* confuses and disturbs as you try to make some sense of the event and the subjects’ relationship with it. These thoughts relate to my previous discussion on palimpsests and the idea of layers of meaning and multifaceted narratives. In pictorial terms, a sense of depth and distance is conveyed, contributing to the aesthetic complexity of the image and the creation of a more credible and substantial imaginary world.

In my own work, examples of this pictorial meta-theatre would be the two paintings set in the Gentlemen’s Rooms at the Globe, *Watching Rehearsals I* and *II* (Figures 30 and 31). Both figures lean over the balcony, and behind each is the painted wall of the gentlemen’s room, decorated with images inspired by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. So here there is not only a picture within a picture, but another layer of artifice: a painting of a painting. In *And These Are Not Fairies* (Figure 32), there are two scenes taking place in two connected but separate spaces, one back stage and one on stage. In this painting both title and image refer to the 2010 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.



Figure 29: Piero della Francesca, *The Flagellation of Christ*. (c.1455-60).



Figure 30: Rosaind Lyons: *Watching Rehearsals I* (2011)



Figure 31: Rosalind Lyons, *Watching Rehearsals II* (2011)

Falstaff is tricked into the woodland at night where he is tormented and teased by the townspeople and children masquerading as fairies and mischievous spirits. In the production at Shakespeare's Globe, the costumes worn by the fairies were reminiscent of rustic, pagan ritual: weird and outlandish masks and robes, much use of raffia, combined with more traditional Elizabethan dress. The effect was strange, disconcerting but visually exciting. The figure in *And These Are Not Fairies* is a boy – probably – and the costume reflects the combination of fantastic and conventional of the performance.

The figure of the boy actor, or fairy, is in the foreground, and seems to have just put on his costume, or perhaps is preparing to return to the stage, waiting for his cue. In this image, as in several other Globe paintings, the composition is dominated and dictated by the structure of the stage. Sitting in the lower gallery, I was watching the rehearsal from the side of the stage and from that viewpoint the strong geometric construction of the set, and especially the diagonal of the steps leading up to the musicians' gallery suggested a structure for a composition. From there I could imagine sitting at the foot of the stairs, looking out at the action on the stage, with a view mainly of the backs of the performers. This composition is all about diagonals: the diagonal of the stairs is echoed by the angle of the figure's left leg, and the right leg is at the opposing angle, and so directs the eye from the shadows to the bizarre strangeness of the queen of the fairies in the brightness of the stage – we can only see the back of the exaggerated construction which frames and from this angle conceals not only the head but the torso. The costumes were deliberately unsophisticated and outlandish, and interesting visually because of the forms of the masks and hats; the pointed hat of the boy actor echoes and reinforces the triangular and diagonal emphasis that is reiterated throughout the composition.

I am interested in exploring unconventional perspectives; watching a play from the usual place of the audience in the auditorium is commonplace, but imagining it from what feels like a hidden, even secret viewpoint, offers a fresh and unfamiliar perspective on the nature of performance.



Figure 32: Rosalind Lyons, *And These Are Not Fairies* (2012)

The title suggests the ambiguity of fairies – Falstaff realises that he has been duped by children disguised as spirits – but also the liminal state of the performer backstage, caught between real self and impersonation.

The underlying motivation for this painting was the fascination with the physical and symbolic threshold between ‘on’ and ‘off’-stage, the transformation inherent in an actor moving from the wings onto the stage, assuming another self and another identity. I am intrigued by the actor backstage, in the wings, in that liminal space where reality and fantasy meet – not only conceptually, but also in visual terms of the transition from darkness into light. In her article *An Uncanny Theatricality: the Representation of the Offstage*, Beliz Güçbilmez argues that offstage: ‘is not a place but an idea....the locus of the uncanny’, and goes on to emphasize the liminality of the space:

...it lies between the fictionality of the stage and the reality of the auditorium. It exists in relation to the stage – but in that relationship, as the prefix ‘off’ suggests, it carries a negative denotation. With its ambiguous, transitory nature, the offstage softens the sharpness between the fictional and the real world: related to both but possessed by neither. It’s where we are in limbo. (Güçbilmez, 2007)

Following Darkness (Figure 33) and *And These Are Not Fairies* (Figure 32) explore this theme. Both are images seen from the backstage looking out; one at a performance in progress on stage, one looking out at the auditorium from the shadow of the musicians’ gallery. Again the figures, the performers, are waiting; there is a keen sense of anticipation. Carol Ann Duffy’s poem ‘Backstage’ connects closely with several of my images, expressing the tension and concentration of an actress attempting to gain composure while waiting in the wings for her cue:

All words by heart as I stand in the dark,
I blank them and breathe, breathe...
(Duffy, 2004, p.140)

The poem also refers to the transition from darkness to light, referring to ‘this dusty gloom’ and ‘all black as I prowls at the edge of the limelight’. Edwin Morgan too conveys the feeling of apprehension in his poem *Instructions to an Actor*, in which last-minute coaching is urgently whispered to a boy player on how to play the statue of Hermione in *A Winter’s Tale*:

Now boy, remember this is the great scene
You’ll stand on a pedestal behind a curtain,
....you don’t breathe, you’re dead,
you’re a dead queen, a statue,
you’re dead as stone....
(Morgan, 1990, p.402)

In Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967) the Player talks of ‘every exit being an entrance somewhere else’ (1967, p.10). The transition from backstage to front stage and vice versa, the idea of figures appearing and disappearing, hidden and revealed, is a constant preoccupation in this body of work. I am interested in the marginal players, in the actors who are a part of the performance, involved in the story, but who are in a sense insubstantial, whose appearance is intermittent, and whose identity and purpose is ambiguous. The idea of exploring alternative perspectives is appealing: in *Adaptations and Appropriation* (2006) Julie Sanders discusses how the play:

..chooses to re-view Hamlet from the theatrical sidelines, from the margins and through the eyes of minor charactersseeing things from marginal or even off-stage characters’ points of view is a common drive in adaptations and appropriations. (Sanders, 2006, p.56)

In *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (2008) Marjorie Garber discusses what she terms the ‘unscene’ (2008, p.221) partly as regards a narrative speech that describes an event that happens offstage, such as Gertrude’s account of Ophelia’s death. But the word ‘unscene’ can also describe an occurrence where the conventional positions of on-stage and off are overturned. In Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* the

usual stage and backstage are reversed, so that the familiar story of *Hamlet* happens elsewhere. The principal focus of this play is the two characters who are peripheral in Shakespeare's original story. Like the subjects of my paintings, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern represent the liminality of the theatre; they exist in anticipation, in uncertainty. They are part of a story but do not know how or why. This play, argues Garber 'both interprets and upends *Hamlet*. It is *Hamlet* inside out, so to speak, seen from the green room, or the wrong end of a telescope' (2008, p.227).

This section has been concerned with two key questions of this project; whether the painted image can express on a static two-dimensional surface the theatrical space and sequential action of performance and whether a painting can express theatre's multiple liminalities. Through considering the qualities and characteristics of painting, and through comparison with the historical representations of stage acting or direct illustrations of the texts, it is evident that painting is able to evoke these aspects rather than directly represent or reproduce. Suggestion rather than direct representation creates uncertainty and liberates the imagination, and the potency of silence and stillness of space in a painting emphasise liminality and ambiguity. The liminal spaces of the Globe theatre, the shifting boundaries between reality and fiction, between past and present, imagination and memory, are explored through experimentation with pictorial space. This aspect has been successfully demonstrated particularly in *Fool and Puppet*, and *It Is But a Shadow's Shadow*, where the monumentality and aesthetic of the theatre's architecture is emphasised. I mention earlier that the distinctive architecture of the Globe became in a sense a character or subject, as well as a compositional device, and these paintings illustrate that strong visual and contextual influence, as well as expressing the intrinsic ambiguity of the theatre. *And These Are Not Fairies* demonstrates another significant aspect of this project, the notion of alternative perspectives; turning things, as Marjorie Garber puts it, inside out.



Figure 33: Rosalind Lyons, *Following Darkness* (2011)

‘So out went the candle and we were left darkling’

(*King Lear* I.iv.208)

The idea of the strange, of defamiliarisation, which is at the heart of the concept of the uncanny, is a principal preoccupation in my practice. But a definition of ‘uncanny’ is hard to pin down. Nicholas Royle begins his book *The Uncanny* (2003) with a lengthy list of possible meanings:

The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feeling of uncertainty...It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was part of nature: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world. But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. (Royle, 2003, p.1)

The themes that I have discussed throughout this commentary – ambiguity, liminality, transformation – are all connected closely with the uncertainty of the uncanny. I am interested in the inbetween-ness of things, in shadows, in the strange and mysterious, in expressing through my images that which Freud referred to in his 1919 essay on the uncanny as ‘intellectual uncertainty’.

In *The Familiar Compound Ghost: Allusion and the Uncanny* (2012), Sarah Annes Brown describes these two elements as being ‘...both characterised by this blend of the familiar and the unfamiliar. An uncanny effect is created when the membrane separating the natural from the supernatural world appears to be punctured...’ (2012, p.2). And in *The Children’s Book*, A.S. Byatt refers to ‘the imagined, interpenetrating world’ (2009, p.141), and describes how one of the characters had seen:

...uncanny creatures, not only in woods near Cambridge, but passing between market stalls, or peering out of windows on the Mile End Road. Our world was interpenetrated, he said. We had known it in the past. We have lost the knowledge. (Byatt, 2009, p.141)

This ‘flickering sense’ of the presence of something ‘other’, of the strange encroaching on the familiar is intrinsic to the creative experience. Byatt’s character feels that we have lost the ‘knowledge’ or awareness of this interpenetration, but it is I believe recognised, revealed and explored through the creative imagination; as the symbolist artist Odilon Redon (1840-1916) expressed it: ‘putting - as far as possible - the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible’ (Redon, 1894).

Shakespeare’s Globe, as I have discussed earlier, is a place where past and present collide, and where there is strong sense of the presence of ghosts. But like any theatre stage it is also a liminal, transformational space, representing a threshold between the real and the imagined. In the plays, reality and fantasy frequently intertwine; the drama moves between the human and magical world, each influencing the other. I am intrigued by the role of fairies, spirits, ghosts and witches, who occupy an uneasy and uncertain liminal space within the plays, intervening with motives that are often ambiguous.

In the early 18th century, the essayist Charles Lamb declared that: ‘Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted - they can only be believed’ (1924, p.140). I don’t share Lamb’s view that Shakespeare should only be read and not performed, but his comment indicates the ambivalence of these magical or supernatural characters in Shakespeare’s plays. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the fairies’ actions may seem malevolent or benign, or simply mischievous, but there is indeniably a dark side, an underlying sense of threat that gives the fairies power to manipulate the emotions and actions of the ‘mortals’. The now traditional depiction of fairies comes mainly from the 19th and early 20th centuries – benign, beautiful, ethereal winged beings, such as portrayed by illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867-1939). But in Shakespeare’s time they were associated with witchcraft, which was then a very real menace. Matthew Woodcock, in ‘Spirits of another sort: Constructing Shakespeare’s fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, stresses the ambiguous nature of fairies, stating that Shakespeare ‘foregrounds the fairies’ ambiguity’, and talks of ‘shape-shifting abilities’ and ‘interpretive ambiguity’ (Woodcock, 2010). He further observes that:

At the heart of popular fairy belief was their capacity to both reward and punish. To those who respected their codes, fairies offered a fantasy of social

empowerment through provision of riches, favours and magical aid with domestic labours....To those who violated their taboos or who simply fell foul of malicious whim, fairies could administer a sharp pinching (as Falstaff suffers at the hands of the 'fairies' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* [5.5.90-102]), they could kill cattle and they had the power to abduct or slay mortals. ...It is this lingering potential for malice and punishment that informs the ambiguous presentation of fairies throughout Shakespeare's plays. (Woodcock, 2010)

Jan Kott in his essay 'Titania and the Ass's Head' (1967) emphasises the dark side of Puck, remarking that his name 'has been one of the names of the devil. His name was invoked to frighten women and children....' (1967, p.171) and goes on to describe Puck's ambiguous 'two-fold nature: that of the Robin Goodfellow and the menacing devil Hobgoblin' (1967, p.172). The witches in *Macbeth* are similarly threatening. They manipulate by prophecy, predicting Macbeth's future and thereby provoking the bloody journey of murder and regicide. But their actions are far more malicious and dangerous than the pranks of Puck; their meeting with Macbeth is planned – they state that 'the charm's wound up' (*Macbeth* I.iii.37). Banquo emphasises the uncanny incongruity of these 'Weird Sisters' (*Macbeth* I.iii.32) exclaiming that they 'look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth, And yet are on't' (*Macbeth* I.ii.41-2). Ghosts too often play a significant part in the plot, most famously Hamlet's father, and Banquo in *Macbeth*; both appear in pivotal moments in the play, creating a thrilling dramatic tension. These spirits, like those summoned by the witches to torment Macbeth, are conjured as if by magic and though crucial to the plot, their sudden appearance is often principally for visual spectacle. There is a link here with the transformation of Hermione in *A Winter's Tale* – though not actually a ghost, the seemingly inanimate statue of Hermione is apparently magically returned to life.

These characters are of the play but at the same time outside it, and in the theatre they not only represent a link between the real and imaginary worlds, but also between the play-world and the audience. The Fool in Shakespeare is similarly intriguing. An outsider, concerned with but simultaneously separate from the action, he – or sometimes she – is an ambiguous liminal character, one that doesn't quite

belong anywhere. In *Fools and Jesters at the English Court* (2003), John Southworth describes how the fool was traditionally perceived:

In some of the earliest European records he is designated *nebulo*...he was seen as a paltry, worthless fellow, a nobody....he existed in a social limbo....alone in his separation. In 15th century scenes of court life, he occupies otherwise empty space or is shown flitting from one group of courtiers to another, a barely corporeal presence. (Southworth, 2003, p.2)

Shakespeare, notably in *King Lear*, portrays the Fool as an incisive observer and commentator, or as Feste describes himself in *Twelfth Night* ‘a corrupter of words’ (*Twelfth Night* III.i.37), but still an isolated and mysterious figure whose ambiguous identity and purpose is unsettling. In *Fool and Puppet* (Figure 34) I drew on a specific production – *Henry VIII* at Shakespeare’s Globe in 2010 – and a specific character. The role of the Fool is not scripted in Shakespeare’s play, but introduced by the director who was intrigued by records of female Fools in the Tudor court discovered while researching for the production. The Fool is in a way a peripheral, but at the same time, meaningful presence, always clutching a life-size puppet in the form of a small child, which acts as a relentless reminder to King Henry of his failure to produce a male heir to his throne. In this production the Fool was played by a woman; however, gender was ambiguous and actually irrelevant. Although the costume was historically that of a man, referring directly to that worn by Henry VIII’s Fool Will Somer in a painting of 1545, to 21st century eyes the tunic could be described as a dress. The Fool is a strange and uncanny presence, constantly and silently haunting the King, hinting at ghosts and premonitions. The puppet too was sinister – too large and lifelike to be believable as a mere doll. This painting perhaps more than any other is the outcome of a particular intense experience stimulated by this character.

The nature of the performer’s movement and gesture was mesmerizing: an almost menacing impression was created by the Fool who haunted and crept around the king. Costumes in this production were frequently lavish and extravagant, but in stark contrast the Fool and her puppet ‘child’ are in sombre black, broken only by glimpses of white under her cap and the white feather in the puppet’s hat. I made

several sketches while watching the dress rehearsals, and was subsequently able to draw directly from the puppet itself. The notes and sketches I made at the rehearsals reflect a particular fascination with this figure (Figures 35 and 36), with annotated comments including: 'Fool often cowering – holds the doll sometimes like a ventriloquist – creepy – scene where doll/puppet appears to speak (when Henry is considering divorce)'; 'Fool holds doll like a child'; and 'Does the Fool act as king's conscience as regards Catherine? Unwelcome reminder of his rejection'.

But the ultimate composition was problematic. As with *The Roaring Boys*, I could not effectively replicate the creeping movement of the Fool on the stage. In the sketches, the sense of movement is successfully conveyed, having much to do with the nature of the medium, and one's technique and preferred method of manipulation. Here, crucially, I was drawing from life, using soft pencil to make visual notes – fleeting impressions of moving subjects. In a drawing made soon after sketching at a rehearsal of the play, the Fool stands rather forlorn, holding the hand of the puppet which drooped lifeless at her side, (actually the pose suggested a rather bleak version of Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh). But although the awkwardness of the Fool's posture on stage was effective, replicating this in the pictorial space was problematic. Balance and harmony in a composition are crucial; there must be nothing to jar or it will irritate the viewer and distract from the whole. The central theory of the 'golden section' is paramount here, and all elements contribute to this principle of compositional balance – not least the space around the principal subjects. When initially developing these images, a particular concern was the relationship between the figure and space, and meanings suggested by the space within the identifiable setting of the Globe theatre. The position of the figure within the space is crucial, suggesting narrative as well as being central to the compositional balance. A single figure will inevitably be the focal point, but the space in which it exists is suggestive; two or more figures will evoke perhaps a variety of possible connotations. The aim was to reflect and relate to theatrical space, and it is important here to consider the scale of a painting. The sensation of working on an image that fills one's field of vision contributes to that feeling of being fully immersed in the work, offering the opportunity to create a sustained dialogue with the image. There is a feeling of freedom, of tremendous excitement in the creative challenge of a major project. This experience is intense, but transient.

The painter Lucian Freud observed that: 'A moment of happiness never occurs in the creation of a work of art. The promise of it is felt in the act of creation, but disappears towards the completion of the work. For it is then that the painter realises that it is only a picture that he is painting. Until then, he had almost dared to hope that it would spring to life'. (Gombrich, 1977, p.80) The larger, full-length figures, such as in *Fool and Puppet*, and *The Roaring Boys*, though not quite life-size, are more real, more tangible. Smaller paintings can convey intimacy but, physically, the process feels constrained, and consequently less connected. There is a sense that it is after all 'only a picture'.

This painting, perhaps more than any other in this body of work, embodies the various themes and addresses the principal research question in this project. There is the obvious reference to the Globe stage, indicated by the column which is such a recognisable feature. There is a strong connection with history, not only with Shakespeare, but with the subject of the play, Henry VIII. There is too a link with a real Fool, Will Somer; his costume depicted in a 16th century painting was copied for the Fool in this production. Historical research into female fools in the Tudor court influenced the casting of a female actor as the Fool. In devising the production, fact and fiction intertwined; the puppet and fool do not appear in Shakespeare's play, but were included by the director of this Globe production as a dramatic device. The painting also illustrates the difficulty of visually translating movement, and the ultimate effectiveness of the final image which, in resolving compositional concerns, reveals a powerful critical response to the performance. *Fool and Puppet* deals, too, with the Fool's isolation – in the production, and in history – and with ambiguity of identity and gender. There is too the suggestion of the uncanny, in the unnerving presence of the puppet. And silence; the Fool does not speak in the play, the puppet is mute, and the painting is, as ever, soundless.

In *Fool and Puppet*, the figures sit together at the base of one of the columns on the stage at Shakespeare's Globe. The space around them is almost featureless darkness - the figures are isolated in and by the pictorial space. The apparently empty space around the figures emphasises the feeling of isolation, but is also permeated with possible and unfixed meanings: the darkness, the shadow suggests mystery, even threat – certainly something unknown.



Figure 34: Rosalind Lyons, *Fool and Puppet* (2010)



Figures 35 & 36: Rosalind Lyons, Sketchbook drawings inspired by *Henry VIII*.

Space that contains nothing identifiable or recognisable is disconcerting and unnerving. Shakespeare eloquently expresses the threat and fear of darkness: Lady Macbeth refers to 'thick Night' (*Macbeth* I.v.49) and 'the blanket of the dark' (*Macbeth* I.v.52) suggesting a sense of being smothered, an impression later reiterated by Macbeth:

Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to th' rooky wood;
(*Macbeth* III.ii.50-51)

Kandinsky, in his characterisation of different colours states that black is: 'a silence, with no possibilities... is something burnt out, like the ashes of a funeral pyre...The silence of black is the silence of death' (Kandinsky, 1912). As Nicholas Royle observes, the uncanny '...comes above all, perhaps, in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness' (2003, p.2). Darkness, or deep shadow can induce feelings of anxiety and apprehension; the fear of what we cannot see, what may be hidden.

Although the setting is implied in this painting, there is ambiguity and uncertainty in terms of what the Fool and puppet are doing. The pose of the figures is significant: in the performance the Fool carries and controls the puppet, but in the painting the puppet, though seated close and seeming to lean on the Fool, is independent and self-contained. In fact, here the puppet could be seen as the more assertive: the Fool is in profile, looking anxiously out of the frame, but the puppet stares boldly and directly at the viewer. The use of space in this picture was a significant development for me. I have talked before about wanting to experiment with 'empty' space that potentially creates a meaning of its own. This emptiness was for me unsettling, disturbed possibly by the uncanny 'uncertainties'. I was I believe actually disconcerted at the idea of leaving a part of an image unresolved, perhaps because I have developed the habit of refining and defining figures and other elements of my paintings to such an extent that to leave an area somehow 'unfinished' would be impossible. I have tried to determine the reason for this, and perhaps it is that I lack confidence in attempting to create texture with paint, or to feel that texture in itself is a positive pictorial element. This experimentation with textural variation and contrast is important in the

consideration of animating space, and I have not yet sufficiently explored this. I have begun to experiment with applying thin layers of colour broken up with areas or patches of white spirit, which has the effect of bleaching and dispersing the paint, creating an interestingly varied surface. After years of preferring the smooth surface of board, ideal for rendering fine detail, I am experimenting with the more absorbent canvas, which enables the work to ‘breathe’ and encourages a wider textural variation. I have long liked the effect of a partly disintegrated fresco, where the paint has worn away, and the exposed plaster – not quite bare but often stained with patches of colour – is juxtaposed with the fine painting and delicate colour of the undamaged image. The contrast between the textures of the rough surface of the wall and the fine translucence of the tempera suggests another kind of liminality, different degrees of reality - or perhaps order out of chaos. Certainly I think it suggests the idea of time passing, transience, of erosion; that something was there, but has disappeared – again a link with the notion of the palimpsest.

In *Puppet and Masks* (Figure 28) the subject was discovered in the Globe’s props store. This puppet is female, and like the ghostly prince in *Fool and Puppet*, is uncomfortably life-like, though less refined. Unlike the smooth, even-featured face of the boy, here the appearance is disturbing: the dress is pretty and feminine and we expect the puppet girl to have the unspoilt beauty of a child, but the ‘flesh’ is rough, the face unfinished and slightly distorted. Her determined gaze is consequently more unsettling, demanding our attention and challenging our preconceptions. In *The Children’s Book* (2009) A S Byatt talks much about the notion that the puppets, though inanimate, are more successful in conveying feeling than a living performer, that their fixed faces are somehow profoundly expressive of a wide range of emotions and meanings, capable of being both:

...grotesque and elegant, sweet and evil, all with that peculiar quality of great marionettes, which is to have one unchanging expression, one character, which can, in motion mysteriously express many moods and passions, simultaneously fixed and serene, and purely expressive. (Byatt, 2009, p.367)

This aptly expresses the ambiguity and unsettling uncertainty of the puppet, whether on stage or represented in a painting. This figure has for me echoes of the

Infanta in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, perhaps subconscious visual connections with the folds of her dress, or the hair, but also here the way in which the girl stares confidently and complacently out of the frame, a still centre in the midst of the distracting interactions of a crowded room. A puppet features too in *Make Our Faces Vizards to our Hearts* (Figure 27), and again looks directly out of the painting at the viewer. In this painting the composition is dominated by the two faces that seem unnervingly similar, yet it is clear that one is 'real' and one an inanimate puppet. The repetition – three versions - of the faces is emphasised by the mask in shadow in the background. The title comes from *Macbeth*, and is I think a markedly insightful statement about deception and equivocation, and the illusion of the painted image. In these three paintings, the presence of a puppet does create confusion in terms of defining real and unreal, animate and inanimate, especially when the puppet seems acutely life-like. Niamh Dunphy describes the puppet as 'blurring the separation between machine and life' (2009, p17), and Sigmund Freud, in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*, quotes the psychologist Ernst Jentsch who questions 'whether an apparently animate being really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate' (Freud, 1919). In a painting, both 'real' and 'unreal' representations of figures (as in *Fool and Puppet*) are created and treated in the same way - in paint, on a two-dimensional surface – so the distinction between them is even more uncertain and destabilised. Freud further observes that 'an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary' (Freud, 1919). Through the medium of paint, these supernatural or inanimate characters achieve a kind of fictive veracity: re-contextualised within the pictorial space, the puppet perhaps assumes a living presence that it could not have on the stage, or in 'real' life.

The influence of the uncanny on this body of work is, like the definition of the term itself, difficult to articulate. It is, essentially, concerned with feeling, a sensation where meaning is elusive, and response is individual. Again, the temporal ambiguity and theatrical liminality of the Globe is a fundamental influence.

The question of whether painting can express theatre's multiple liminalities has been explored in this section, and that exploration has touched on many and diverse disciplines, verbal and visual, on the theatre, on Shakespeare's enigmatic characters,

stories and language, on psychoanalysis, on secrets, shadows and the supernatural. Meanings and interpretations shift and change, responses are transitory. Ambiguous and liminal uncertainty is an inherent aspect of this project, and of the painted image. Research into the uncanny has related largely to literature, rarely to – or through – visual art; this investigation presents an original and wide-ranging interdisciplinary perspective.

‘I am not that I play’

(*Twelfth Night* I.v.179)

The ambiguity of identity has been a consistent preoccupation in my paintings. I have earlier explored the notion of destabilisation, blurred boundaries and shifting states of being: even in past work, I felt that it was important that the figures were not quite what they seemed. In this project I have become much more aware, in a theatrical context, of the boundaries between impersonator and observer, performer and audience and the idea of the actor embodying a liminal threshold between real and imaginary, truth and deception, and between male and female. In previous paintings, my subjects were – influenced by Shakespeare’s heroines such as Rosalind and Viola, and Virginia Woolf’s Orlando – frequently cross-dressed. In *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, Viola and Rosalind (played at the original Globe by boys or young men) disguise themselves as male, and the idea of the many-layered disguise and multiple identities of a boy actor playing a girl dressed as a boy is visually intriguing. Jan Kott in his essay ‘Shakespeare’s Bitter Arcadia’ expresses the resulting confusion:

An actor disguised as a girl plays a girl disguised as a boy. Everything is real and unreal, false and genuine at the same time. And we cannot tell on which side of the looking glass we have found ourselves. As if everything were mere reflection. (Kott, 1967, p.219)

A sense of gendered ambiguity, described by Michael Shapiro as ‘unfused, discreetly layered gender identities’ (Shapiro, 1994, p.4) is always present in my subjects, though in varying degrees. However, the concept of the ambiguity of identity interests me in the context of visual illusion and theatrical transformation rather than gender and sexuality. Sarah Gorman in her article ‘The Theatricality of Transformation ’ (2008) describes the ‘transformative identities’ of the cross-dressed actor, stating that they maintain ‘...an in-between doubleness, a state of being that could potentially (but not yet) resolve into masculine or feminine...the actor is arrested in a state of potentiality, always on the verge of transformation’ (Gorman, 2008). The idea of the performer embodying this theatrical and visual liminality,

poised on the threshold between one 'self' and another is particularly evocative, and it is this innate uncertainty that I have explored more consciously in the Globe paintings. Shakespeare frequently expresses doubt as to what is real or unreal, and the ambiguity of identity; Viola in *Twelfth Night* hints at her disguise: 'I am not that I play' (I.v.179), Iago declares that: 'I am not what I am' (*Othello* I.v.64), and in *Troilus and Cressida* '...this is, and is not Cressid' (V.ii.153). At Shakespeare's Globe cross-gender casting, both all-male and all-female, has been employed in some productions, notably *Twelfth Night* (2002) and *Taming of the Shrew* (2003). Informed by research into Early Modern theatre practice of the cross-dressed boy actor, the result in contemporary performance has been a fascinating destabilisation of conventional perceptions of gender. In 'Performing Gender at the Globe: The Technologies of the Cross-Dressed Actor', Judith Rose argues that:

...the female Shakespearean character...is in one sense... a trick of appearance, whose very insubstantiality is made clear in an "Original Practices" production. The cross-dressed boy/man impersonating a woman on the stage both conceals and unmasks the spoken "woman"; this pantomime of the volatility of gender disrupts and disturbs the audience, in many cases requiring an re-examination of implicit assumptions of heteronormativity. (Rose, 2008)

Costume is an essential element in performance; it can establish identity and suggest character. It is also a significant element in my work, considered both aesthetically and in the theatrical context as a means of disguise and deception. The elaborate nature of the dress accentuates the contrast between the natural and the contrived, between truth and artifice. In a painting, the extravagant decorative intricacy also serves to create distance between viewer and subject, to distract, provoking further doubt about the true identity of the character. In this body of work the figures are dressed in the fashion of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, and from a contemporary perspective we may assume that these are theatrical costumes. But in the ambiguous context of the pictorial image, they could be imagined portrayals of audience members or backstage hands at the original theatre, so that the historical context, as well as identity, is uncertain. In relation to the theme of cross-

dressing, the late 16th and early 17th century styles of doublet, ruffs, cloaks and headwear were often common to both male and female, and for a female character to disguise herself as male, the transformation was not complicated. In Virginia Woolf's fictional biography *Orlando* (1928) the protagonist lives through various historical periods, sometimes as a man, and sometimes a woman. Introducing the Elizabethan Orlando, Woolf alludes to the elaborate dress of the period, and its androgynous inclination: '...there could be no doubt of his sex, although the fashion of the time did something to disguise it' (Woolf, 1928). In the theatre, it is important that the audience accept and collude in the deception of the cross-dressed character, as they must in the fiction of the play itself. In relation to *As You Like It*, Judith Dusinberre observes that:

...The audience is asked to believe that in the end the boy really is the woman, Rosalind, only to be immediately disabused of that fiction in the Epilogue.....What has happened to the body, male or female, what you will? Under this analysis it totally disappears, has become indeed a fiction. But has it?...Do we believe in the woman's body? I think we do ... We believe in it precisely because it is a fiction..... But Rosalind's body exists only as a constant act of evasion. Is she man without and woman within? The categories of outer and inner cease at this point to contain any capacity for clarification. The fiction of the play has exploded them. (Dusinberre, 2000)

Similarly, the fiction of the painted image destabilises assumptions about identity, gender and even character. Unlike the dramatic story in which there is, usually, some kind of resolution or conclusion, in the static image the narrative is uncertain. In my paintings, age too is indeterminate, although the figures are probably young rather than old. Some could be on the cusp of adulthood, another liminal threshold, between childhood and maturity; as Malvolio describes Viola in her guise as the young man Cesario:

Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy: as a squash is before 'tis a peascod...

(*Twelfth Night* I.v.153-4)

And Sarah Gorman supports this impression of a transitional state:

Staged cross-dressing is frequently accompanied by a fascination with the youthfulness of the boy.A woman who disguises herself as a boy rather than a man enters into a state of even more heightened ambiguity because boys are likewise caught in a transformative state of existence.

(Gorman, 2008)

The unsullied faces of my subjects convey an impression of purity, but there is also a suggestion of a knowing innocence, similar to the effect of the mannequin's fixed expression. Children's faces are rather like mannequins; they are unresolved, yet to suffer the ravages of time (and consequently extremely difficult to paint).

Contemplation of the unknown, unfamiliar or mysterious, tends to provoke feelings of dread and apprehension, and so the uncanny or supernatural can often materialise into grotesque representations. But I would argue that beauty, in the sense of physical perfection, can be equally unsettling. Aristotle believed that beauty should conform to mathematical theories of order and symmetry of form, and this ideal seems to be still evident today. Faces of magazine models are unnatural in their regularity and flawlessness; they are frequently ambiguous as regards age, time and place, and even gender. This uncertainty, this blurring of boundaries, makes their aesthetic perfection somehow disturbing rather than appealing. The figures in my paintings tend towards a rather idealised and ethereal appearance, and lack the imperfect but more 'natural' individual physiognomy.

My technique is significant in conveying this impression, influenced by the Renaissance painters principally in my treatment of faces, and is to a certain extent deliberate. I intend anonymity and, while I try to make them at least credible, it is important to sustain the impression of something unknowable and indefinable.

The faces I invent are not perfectly beautiful, but their apparent impassivity is enigmatic. Like A.S. Byatt's mannequins in *The Children's Book*, the figures imply that although their expression is fixed, this is only a momentary state; they are potentially capable of profound expression. (Byatt, 2009) The Italian Renaissance painter Paulo Lomazzo (1538-1592) declared that painting not only imitates 'the nature of corporall things' but that it also represents 'their actions, gestures,

expressing moreover divers affections and passions in the mind'. (1598, cited in Karim-Cooper, 2006, p.5) The face though is the initial focus of the viewer, and our facial expressions are the fundamental means of expressing meaning. In everyday interaction, and in contemplating a painting, we study the face in order to assess character, mood, and to gain some understanding of the nature of our communication with person or image. The face can express, but can also hide. Shakespeare, notably in *Macbeth*, emphasises the ability of the face to conceal and equivocate: 'False face must hide what the false heart doth know' (*Macbeth* I.vii.84) and: 'Make our faces vizards to our hearts' (*Macbeth* III.ii.34).

In the theatre, cosmetics have long been used as a transformational device. In Shakespeare's time they were not only used to feminise the boy players: according to Andrea Stevens in 'Cosmetic Transformations' (2013): '...theatrical paint created a range of visual effects beyond the representation of femininity in an all-male theatre.....Early Modern defenders and detractors alike imagined paint as embodying the essence of theatricality' (Stevens, 2013). The use of white face paint produces a striking aesthetic effect of ethereality, that in a painting frequently induces intrigue and fascination. To me, it suggests something other-worldly but inherently theatrical, but a painted face can also have negative connotations of something tawdry and false. Shakespeare seems to share this perception, frequently implying paint's illusory and deceptive qualities: references to paint include 'false painting' (*Sonnet* 67, 5); 'This is the very painting of your fear' (*Macbeth* III.iv.60); 'O well-painted passion!' (*Othello* IV.i.257); 'I called thee then poor shadow, painted queen' (*Richard III* IV.iv.83). Hamlet, in his tirade against women, emphasises the artificiality of cosmetics: 'God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another.' (*Hamlet* III.i.144-5), and again in *Hamlet*, Claudius asks Laertes:

...are you like the painting of a sorrow
A face without a heart?
(*Hamlet* IV.vii.9-10)

Theatrical face paint, as well as adorning and feminising the face, is a means of disguise. Farah Karim-Cooper in *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (2006) describes the various ways in which cosmetics function in

Shakespearean drama: 'face paints allow for a variety of significations: femininity, identity, supernaturalism' (2006, p.4) but she goes on to say that theatrical performers:

...perform selves that are necessarily disparate from the inner selves...cosmetics are crucial elements in creating this disparity. When we paint our faces we are one step further away from our inner self...disguise not only forces one to take on a new physical appearance, it facilitates the assumption of a different identity. (2006, p.72-3)

The face paint here then functions as a mask, intended to project a contrived outer image of another self. In my representations of theatrical performers or characters, there is the double illusion of the painted image of a face and the image of a painted face. A further reference to paint in Shakespeare is 'painted counterfeit' (*Sonnet 16*, 8). The word 'counterfeit' now generally means something fake or fraudulent, but in the 16th century this was only one of several meanings; it could denote something made through creative or artistic endeavour, and occurs in Shakespeare's text in connection with acting, meaning pretence or impersonation. Counterfeit could also mean a portrait, for which another word then used was the term 'shadow'. This is a highly evocative word, again with multiple meanings. Significantly, it was used in the Early Modern theatre as a colloquial name for actors (Astington, 2010, p.30-31): Macbeth declares that 'Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage...'; (*Macbeth* V.v.24-5) and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck's epilogue begins: 'If we shadows have offended...' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* V.i.417). There are many definitions of shadow in the OED, and among the most pertinent here are: 'as a type of what is fleeting or ephemeral'; 'an unreal appearance; a delusive semblance or image'; 'An imitation, copy; a counterpart' (OED, 2015); and particularly: 'Applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original; also to an actor or a play in contrast with the reality presented.' (OED, 2015) So here there is a further link between the theatre and the painted image, between the actor and the imagined subjects of my paintings. A shadow can, like a ghost, be perceived as an insubstantial and illusory copy of an original. The impression is one of inferiority, and yet there is power in an illusion.

Hamlet argues that the purpose of acting should ideally be ‘to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature’ (*Hamlet* III.ii.22-3); and this reflection, or what Stephen Greenblatt calls ‘the formal self-conscious miming of life’ (1990, p.1) can in a performance or visual imagery create a compelling reality of its own. Rather than a ‘semblance’, my aim is for the painted figure to convey a sense of a living presence, to give the impression that they could at any moment, as Lucian Freud said, ‘spring to life’ (1977, p.80).

It is clear in the Shakespeare’s Globe exhibition that the figure has remained dominant and constant, but the idea of the liminal figure has in this work broadened from gendered liminality as personified by the Shakespearean cross-dressed boy actor, to an examination of the ambiguous and protean quality of the theatrical performer. Unlike much previous theatre or performance-related imagery, these paintings are not merely representations of an actor or a play, but a more extensive exploration of how the actor’s identity fluctuates between reality and artifice, and the nature of illusion in both painting and performer. The discussion on shadows, and its various cross-disciplinary connotations, is expressed in the illusive ambiguity of the subjects of all the paintings in this project, and a significant concern in the exploration of parallels between painting and theatre.

‘Now I am alone’

(*Hamlet* II.ii.549)

It is curious that from a period of observation of various performances involving large casts of characters, much activity, sound, movement, complex dramatic and figurative relationships, I have produced a body of work in which almost all the images focus on individual figures, frozen in a moment, in thought, or even trapped within space - like Hamlet: ‘...bounded in a nutshell..’ (*Hamlet* II,ii,255) Almost all the images in the Shakespeare’s Globe exhibition depict isolated figures. I am not sure that these figures convey loneliness, but rather a sense of melancholy and remoteness. Although the figures are isolated in the pictorial space, there is a strong impression of absence, that something is happening outside the ‘frame’, something that they are watching, or hearing, or are somehow aware of. They seem arrested in anticipation, unable to move – due to their own vacillation, or perhaps waiting for someone to tell them to move, to speak.

In Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1967), the entire play takes place in an indefinable location, a liminal space: two protagonists, minor characters in *Hamlet*, are caught in a sort of limbo in which they are confused and incapable of independent action. The introductory stage directions emphasise the uncertainty of context and direction at the onset of the play; ‘Two Elizabethans passing the time in a place without any visible character’. (1967, p.1) When the action of *Hamlet* does occasionally encroach, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play their parts, speak the lines, but there is constant tension and uncertainty as they try to understand why they are there and who they are. They dwell on the fact that they have no understanding of their past or future, only that they have been ‘sent for’, and have no memory of anything before. They speak of ‘...an unremembered past’ (1967, p.6), and how there used to be ‘...answers to everything’. (1967, p.29) They are nervous, uncertain of their place and purpose: ‘We have not beenpicked out....simply to be abandoned.....set loose to find our own way.....We are entitled to some direction....I would have thought’ (1967, p.10).

The figures in my paintings share that indeterminate state, that feeling of separation, though not the nervous confusion. There are any number of possible interpretations: a narrative is there, but one that is not temporal or linear in the sense

that there is a story being acted out, but a narrative of feeling, of being and of identity. There is a sequence of moments, states of hesitation and anticipation – a layered narrative – the figure, character, or actor is arrested on that liminal threshold or boundary between one scene, or one state, and another. There is also a narrative sequence of transitional states, none of which are definitive or finite, that continue to develop as perceptions change. This impression is fundamental I believe to the act of viewing, or reading a painting, and also in the process of its making. While creating a painting, an image is in a state of continual flux - as forms, colour and line vary and develop and, as the emerging image suggests and evades solutions, demands reference and definition. But ultimately, when a painting is completed, meanings continue to shift, subject to the perceptual vagaries of the individual viewer.

Perhaps that moment is one, unusual for the actor, of solitude, and of intense concentration and a rare interlude of un-self-consciousness. I was fascinated by this during dress rehearsals – observing actors shift between self and impersonation, between different realities and identities - especially when they were distanced from the ‘action’, on the periphery. They participate in terms of being an observer – but were anonymous. I was especially drawn to the performers when they were not actually acting, but watching others rehearsing. At the time I was conscious of being an outsider, a secret and invisible watcher; I was watching the watchers, studying the actors moving from one state to another, transforming from ‘real’ self to performance, to impersonation.

I wonder if actors are in some way diminished when not acting? On stage their movements, gestures and speech define who they are – or at least, the character they are presenting, their part in the story and their relationships with the other characters. But when they cease performing, when they step back into the shadows, suddenly we do not know who they are. The two paintings *Watching the Rehearsals I* and *II* (Figures 30 and 31) I think successfully convey this uncertainty. These images were inspired by similar instances during two different rehearsals for productions of Howard Brenton’s *Anne Boleyn* (2010), and Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*, both part of the 2010 season. One was a male actor, sitting in the front of the middle gallery, the other an actress leaning over the balcony rail of one of the Gentlemen’s Rooms. For me the fascination relates to the fact that the actors were, as discussed above, suddenly out of context. They were off stage, they were not where they

should be. They were not performing, or pretending; they were still in costume, but that costume was for a time, like the actor, without purpose. So the image of the solitary actor leaning over the balcony, displaced, silent and lost in contemplation of the activity on the stage was intriguing. In both paintings, the figures are looking away, their attention drawn to something beyond the frame.

In *It is But a Shadow's Shadow* (Figure 37) there are parallels with the two *Watching the Rehearsals* images in terms of content, but the scale is larger and the figure's isolation is further emphasised by the surrounding space. The setting is specific; this figure leans over the balustrade of the musicians' gallery, overlooking the Globe stage. Gender is ambiguous and age is indeterminate and character and purpose is uncertain: he or she could be performing or just observing. The figure has a stillness and monumentality while allowing the form and space to dissolve into shadow. The viewer's attention is drawn not only to the figure but to the space behind; but here the depth of field is diminished by the distinctive decorative elements which command attention. The ornamental architectural detail, although largely in shadow, achieves a significant presence in the composition. The statue is of course inanimate, a carved representation but, like the wall paintings in the Gentlemen's Rooms, acts as an echo of reality, another layer of illusion or artifice.

The title is taken from *Hamlet*, Act II, scene 2, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are engaged in a somewhat surreal conversation with a wary Hamlet, and was chosen partly because of its literal relevance to the shadows of the image, but also because of the allusion to the idea of actors as shadows. And it, too, suggests the illusory nature, or as Rosencrantz puts it '...so airy and light a quality' (*Hamlet* II.ii.263) of the painted image: a shadow of a shadow, and in the context of the new Globe, a copy of a copy.

'Tis Not So Sweet Now as it was Before (Figure 38) again depicts a single figure, seemingly lost in contemplation. Here the subject is a musician, a viol player, pictured in the musician's gallery during the performance of Howard Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* (2010). The set of this production was very striking, and the principal motivation for the painting; white backdrops subdued the vibrant colour and largely concealed the decorative elements of the stage, making the space appear unusually clear and open.



Figure 37: Rosalind Lyons, *It is But a Shadow's Shadow* (2012)



Figure 38: Rosalind Lyons, *'Tis Not So Sweet Now As It Was Before* (2012)

In the musicians' gallery, the forms of the musicians contrasted starkly with the white wall behind them, which was only adorned by a row of hand bells. In these paintings, this silent detachment is significant. This feeling of separation, this otherness is surely an intrinsic characteristic of a painting. It represents a kind of fictive reality, which though powerful is nonetheless only an image, and that image is the result of selection, a subjective re-contextualisation; the figures in the paintings, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, have been 'sent for'. But there is also a sense that they are connected with the action of a story, that they are at times a necessary part of something going on elsewhere. In previous work, I have looked at actual characters from the plays – some inspired by a character, but some whose possible identity was only suggested during or after the painting was completed. But, though named, the subject still evades absolute definition, as they could be an actor in or out of character, and their real identity remains obscure.

Examples are *Cesario and Olivia* (2009) (Figure 39) which plays with the ambiguity inherent in the theatrical convention of cross-dressing, and *Juliet* (2009) (Figure 40) whose title was actually suggested only by the fact that the painting is of a young girl, and the costume is a direct representation of that used in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at Shakespeare's Globe. A character is a fictional creation, open to a variety of textual and dramatic interpretations. In identifying the subject of a painting I am offering only a possibility or a context.

Only one painting in the Globe exhibition is of a specific character, that of Fleance, Banquo's son (Figure 41). The composition was directly inspired by a scene from the production of *Macbeth* in 2010 in which Fleance playfully tries on the crown of Scotland, perched on the impressive wooden throne. Fleance speaks little but his part in the plot of *Macbeth* is important, signifying the failure of Macbeth's murderous plans to destroy his real and imagined enemies. Fleance miraculously escapes the murderers of his father and, as the witches have predicted, a future line of kings is eventually descended from him. The image is a simple one of a young and vulnerable child lounging on a throne, wearing a crown that is too big for him. The backdrop is an empty blackness. Fleance's stance, that could be perceived as relaxed or weary, or perhaps resigned, contrasts with the austere formality of the throne, but his expression is solemn and to me suggests isolation and painful experience gained too early.



Figure 39: Rosalind Lyons, *Cesario and Olivia* (2009)



Figure 40: Rosalind Lyons, *Juliet* (2009)



Figure 41: Rosalind Lyons, *Fleance* (2011)

Performers interpret and translate the language of the plays, as well as embodying both visual and textual transformation. In *Imagining Shakespeare* Stephen Orgel discusses what he calls ‘that tension between text and performance’ (2003, p.4):

...what is real or essential about the text, the words? They create the play.
But the words are spoken by characters, and require actors to express
them...we might argue that this is the real essence of theatre: not the texts of
plays at all, but the performance of actors. (Orgel, 2003, p.9)

.....I am particularly attracted by the description of the players as ‘ciphers’ by the chorus in the Prologue to *Henry V*:

And let us, ciphers to this great account,
On your imaginary forces work.
(*Henry V* Prologue.17-18)

The term suggests that the actors interpret and even transform the text, but it also implies secrecy. There is a sense of uncertainty, that there is a hidden meaning, or that truth is disguised. Definitions of ‘cipher’ in the Oxford English Dictionary are curiously varied and sometimes contradictory. For instance, in a mathematical context it means a sort of catalyst – something or someone that makes something happen, although insubstantial in themselves. But it can also mean a kind of code; ‘...a secret or disguised manner of writing’ (OED, 2015); and as a verb: ‘To express, show forth, make manifest by any outward signs, portray, delineate’ (OED, 2015). which brings us closer to a description of the art of acting, and certainly the art of painting. Some definitions describe the word as meaning someone of little or no consequence: ‘A person who fills a place but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a mere nothing’. (OED, 2015) So ‘cipher’ can mean a code, secret message, or a nobody. But far from being inconsequential these meanings are potentially powerful, suggesting deception, disguise and equivocation.

Shakespeare’s Fools, for instance, frequently describe themselves, or are referred to, as nobodies, but are unquestionably much more; the actor could embody a code, a symbol, or a secret message, giving depth to a performance, image or narrative.

There is the suggestion that the outer, the external is concealing an internal secret. Mark Rylance in discussing Shakespeare's Globe's Original Practices production of *Twelfth Night* comments that:

...the players loved hiding and revealing...it is a part of great storytelling and it is also a part of most of the main characters, that they have something very hidden which everyone else is trying to figure out...

(Quoted in Karim-Cooper, 2008, p.69)

In *Richard II*, the deposed king asks for a mirror to see if the inner turmoil and grief is manifested in his face, but Bolingbrooke calls the reflection 'the shadow of your sorrow' (*Richard II* IV.i.292). Richard responds:

'Tis very true, my grief lies all within,
And these external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul.
There lies the substance...
(*Richard II* IV.i.295-9)

To Richard, the 'shadow' is the superficial external impression of much greater emotion, but it can also describe internal disturbance. Another definition of shadow is the psychologist Carl Jung's description of the word as: 'The dark aspect of personality formed by those fears and unpleasant emotions which...exist in the personal unconscious' (OED, 2015). There is a suggestion in the paintings that the subjects are involved in some solitary intense introspection, that there is an inner life or preoccupation that the viewer feels rather than sees. Secrets are crucial to Shakespeare's plays and many of his characters. Some conceal their identities to evade or escape a situation in which someone is threatened, other secrets take the form of internal dilemmas. Macbeth is tormented by the secret of the murder of the king; Iago is obsessed with secret envy and jealousy. Hamlet is fixated with the real and imagined secrets of others, and Ophelia is ultimately destroyed by the secret machinations of the Elsinore court. I talked earlier of the pictorial isolation of the

subjects of my images – but these characters too are isolated; by secrets that undermine and destabilise identity and purpose.

Shakespeare's use of the word cipher is typically ambiguous; is the actor trying to express the 'truth' of their role, portray an honest interpretation that will enhance the meaning of the story? Or, as the use of the word cipher might suggest, are they trying to deceive, confuse and mislead the audience? Perhaps, in a less sinister reading, the actor is a vehicle through which Shakespeare presents a plethora of possible interpretations, multiple layers of meanings of character and text. In an observation which echoes my previous discussion about puppets, Alice Rayner considers the performer as translator and transformer: '...the actor embodies and gives life to a non-living thing and essentially erases the differences between the living and the dead to produce an uncanny spectacle in which the animate and inanimate coalesce'.(2006, p. xv) Similarly, David Marshall, in his article 'Exchanging Visions: Reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' (1982), talks of the actors as embodying the threshold between real and unreal, and compares them to changelings, a fairy who has replaced a stolen human child: 'We could say that the play is performed by changelings because that is what actors are....someone Protean who would not stay the same from one moment to the next...Actors take others parts and places; they exchange themselves for others, substitute others for themselves.' (1982, p.543-575); or as the Player declares in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: 'We're actors - we're the opposite of people!' (1967, p.41).

The anonymous subjects of this series of images embody the theme of ambiguity of identity, ambiguity of time, place and character. There is as I have explored earlier an inherent illusion in the performer, a deception in the activity of impersonation. On the stage, we do at least accept that these are actors, speaking lines and performing the actions dictated by the drama, but in a painting, their context and purpose is less certain. The isolation of the single figures in most of these paintings further confuses, implying an absence, a narrative taking place elsewhere, which demands the imaginative engagement of the viewer. The discussion in this section relating to the correlation between ciphers, shadows and performance reinforces the contention that the painted image is closely affiliated, not only with performance, but with Shakespeare's text and characters.

EPILOGUE

One definition of liminality is ‘occupying a position at, or both sides of, a boundary or threshold’ also, relating to a process, ‘transitional’. (OED, 2005): the development of an image is a continuous process of transition and transformation; elements appear, are hidden, then reappear as decisions, often intuitive, are made during the development of the composition. The process of painting, the nature of painting itself, transforms an idea, a place, into something else; it gives the subject matter, the content, another kind of presence. The process takes on its own momentum, posing more questions, offering new perspectives and perhaps ultimately providing some kind of clarification.

I have discussed significant visual and verbal references that have had a direct impact on my work, but, like any artist, influences can come from anywhere; momentary images from films, photographs, theatre, radio, literary fiction or everyday experience. Sources are unpredictable; random, chance triggers that suggest images, and provoke visual or verbal connections. I have become more aware of the integration of the theoretical and the critical into my practice; the visual and the verbal constantly inform each other, creating a dialogue that shifts from one to the other and drives the work forward. I can describe intentions and influences, but when I begin working on a painting all the sources of my research become subliminal. The images that ultimately emerge create nuances and suggest meaning and make connections of which I may or may not be conscious until later. While observing and making visual notes in the Globe Theatre, particularly during my experience watching rehearsals in the auditorium, I was very aware of the complexity of different realities, and the blurring of boundaries between past and present, reality and fiction, and the ambiguous, fluctuating identities of the performers. The paintings in the exhibition reflect this experience; the images are arrested in a moment of transition and transformation, representing a liminal threshold between opposing states. The subjects are caught between the future and the past, between dark and light, between reality and illusion, but boundaries change, thresholds shift: identities are enigmatic, the context uncertain - something ‘that is, and is not’ (*Twelfth Night* V.i.213).

In attempting to analyse and deconstruct my practice I, too, frequently find myself on the threshold between the objective and subjective, between intuitive response and academic theory. In his essay 'Intuition and Art' (1980) Louis Arnaud Reid considers the role of intuition in the creative process, in 'the discovery of aesthetic meaning through making' and 'the dialogue between the artist and his medium':

Artists vary a great deal. At one extreme, the intuitive factor so dominates that the artist's work is almost an automatic writing. At the other extreme, there are artists so self-critical or so overly aware of generalised concepts about art that their intuitions are inhibited. Ideally, the intuitive and the critical go hand in hand; intuition guides the imaginative process of making, is influenced by critical experience, and yet is free. Here, as in the contemplation of given art, it is to intuition that the artist must continually return. (Reid, 1980)

Reid perceptively touches on a thorny issue when he remarks that the artist's intuition is 'inhibited' by self-criticism and theoretical conceptualisation. Embarking on an extensive critical analysis of my practice has, perhaps paradoxically, had a disruptive effect on my creativity. In this commentary I have endeavoured to produce a lucid, theoretical examination of a period and body of work, but have frequently encountered the difficulty of verbalising what is essentially a non-verbal process. As Silke Dettmers puts it in her essay 'On the Necessity of Wonder': 'It is the linear, ordered qualities of language that confound the artists. A sentence "points", it has a beginning and an end, it deals in finality. It sits there, tidy, in black on white; it is not uncertain, it has no doubt.' (Dettmers, 2008)

And my mind wanders. I look at my sketches and my notes and am distracted with thoughts on Puck and Ariel, on Fools, on Hamlet's soliloquies, on Richard II gazing at his reflection in a mirror, on the intricacies of Elizabethan dress. Then I remind myself I am supposed to be evaluating my paintings, their effectiveness, meaning, relevance or otherwise. But in reality, all these digressions *are* my practice; all these thoughts, passing reflections, vague suggestions of images – this is what I *do*. The poet John Keats used the phrase 'negative capability', which, he said, 'Shakespeare possessed so enormously... that is, when a man is capable of being in

uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...’ (*Selected Letters of John Keats*, 2002, p.60.) And this uncertainty, mystery and doubt is fundamental to creative activity; there is a language, but it is often subliminal - as Harold Pinter put it, ‘locked beneath’ (1999, p.23). In *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think* (2013) several artists and art writers express, far more successfully than I, the enigmatic and often indefinable nature of the creative process. The writer Donald Barthelme states that ‘The not knowing is crucial to art, is what permits art to be made....without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions there would be no invention’ (1997, quoted in Fisher and Fortnum, 2013, p.8).

I have earlier considered the idea of the uncanny in relation to the theatre, to Shakespeare and to my images, the notions of familiar and unfamiliar. The uncanny is often characterised as something threatening or frightening; the dread of shadows and silence. But venturing into the unknown means to me the prospect of exciting creative possibilities: a place of wonder where outcomes are unpredictable and perhaps ultimately unfathomable. Rachel Jones in her essay ‘On the value of not knowing: wonder, beginning again and letting be’, agrees with Barthelme that not knowing is crucial to creativity, and quotes Nietzsche’s description of this aspect of the creative process: ‘the protracted secret labour and artistic working of my instinct’ (1908). Jones further argues that:

One of the counter-processes that tends to block or shut down such ‘artistic working’ is the quest for knowledge itself, understood as a desire to reduce the strange to the familiar...Part of the “artistic work” of becoming thus lies in remaining open to the strange in its strangeness; being prepared to lose ourselves in the encounter; risking *not* knowing as the condition of possible transformation. (Jones, 2013)

I have always been conscious that I wanted my paintings to be mysterious, not overt in context or subject matter: many of my subjects – perhaps all – are anonymous. I *know* the figures in my paintings but do not need to know who they *are*. When the paintings are finished, the intense relationship, or dialogue, with the work during its making, for me, ceases quite abruptly. The subjects move on, fly the coop, become something else, almost as if they refuse to be defined or explained. I can express

intentions, I can describe what ideas, experiences or research areas have underpinned, and to some extent brought about, the development of an image. But it is much more problematic to articulate reasons for specific decisions. When beginning a painting I am venturing into the unknown, and then when it is done, the image is somehow surprising and strange. It has become something unexpected. The artist Sonia Boyce describes a similar experience:

When I'm able to step back, I see that besides the things that I thought [my] work was about, there's other things seeping in....I don't need to adhere to a declaration of intent; a right and a wrong. Instead I say, "Let's just see what this is and how it unfolds".

(2007, quoted in Fisher and Fortnum, 2013, p.77)

This is a regular experience; particular examples in this body of work are *The Roaring Boys* and *Fool and Puppet*. The first, despite a clear source of inspiration, continues to confuse and defy interpretation. The latter however offers an unanticipated and intriguing perspective on the character of the Fool, and the Puppet's unsettling influence in the composition.

Now, looking back at this group of images after a period of some years, the distance of time too alters my perception. The paintings or perhaps more specifically the characters in them, become remote but at the same time familiar – an elusive, half-remembered memory. It is as if they have existed only fleetingly, then disappear into that imagined world that I created but to which I am no longer connected. As the deranged Ophelia remarks rather enigmatically: 'We know what we are, but know not what we may be.' (*Hamlet* IV.v.43-4) The paintings have meanwhile become something else, subject to different responses in unknown contexts and environments.

But I have not finished with Shakespeare. I remarked earlier that in these paintings I have not been concerned with the representation of Shakespeare's plays; that although the plays were often influential, they acted as starting points for a wide range of themes and preoccupations. While revisiting my notes made at Shakespeare's Globe, I came across the comment 'I need to get my characters onstage', which

seems to anticipate an increasing interest in the texts, and an intention to explore ideas more directly inspired by Shakespeare's language, character and narrative.

As stated in the Prologue, the aim of this project was to investigate and explore through the painted image a series of questions. Various strands of research interconnect and overlap; questions are unfixed and ambiguous, often suggesting alternative directions and meanings.

In addressing the question of whether the painted image can express on a static, two-dimensional surface the theatrical space and sequential action of performance, I have examined and inevitably compared different disciplines, and have been compelled to consider the limitations as well as the creative possibilities of the two-dimensional image. It soon became apparent that direct representation or the translation of movement was not my aim, and the nature of stillness and, particularly, silence – both in performance, and in painting – became a significant concern. This development proved to be a positive starting point, in effect rejecting action and instead invigorating an enquiry into silence and stillness with liminal space, the uncanny, and the idea of variations of interpretation and perception. This stasis and silence are potent qualities of this work, closely related to the idea of the subjects - and the paintings themselves - being arrested on a liminal threshold between one time, one state of being, and another.

Regarding whether a painting can express the transformative, fictive and illusive aspects of performance, there emerged a much closer correlation between painting and theatre. I mention earlier that in contemplating the parallels between my visual imagery and the theatre, I often felt strongly an affinity with the role of a playwright or theatre director - inventing narratives, creating characters, designing costumes, arranging props and choreographing movement, and presenting all on a pictorial 'stage'. The essential illusion and fiction of theatre, and the Shakespearean convention of disguise and deception are implicit in the paintings. Research into Shakespearean theatre history - in particular the Early Modern practice of using boy players - and the long-standing preoccupation in my own practice with androgynous figures, revealed significant parallels between performance and imagery. The ambiguity of identity is a persistent theme – the viewer is compelled to interpret and interrogate their own response.

In exploring whether a painting can express theatre's multiple liminalities, the investigation into the uncanny, the unfamiliar in the midst of the familiar, instilled a more conscious sense of the hidden and the unknowable. The paintings reveal a preoccupation with the nature of performance, the player's embodiment of both reality and imagination, and the transformational, liminal space of the Globe theatre, where reality and fantasy, past and present converge. Many writings concerned with liminality in anthropology, literature and psychology imply a state or place where reality is suspended, of arrested action; somewhere where nothing happens. Lee Ufan in 'Robots and Painters' observes that:

Painters... realise that the world exists in the interval between the brush, the canvas, the paint and the hand, elements which attract or repel each other, rather than in the meaning of painting. Painters do not aim at finishing or completing a painting, because the act of painting itself belongs to a different dimension from the system of knowledge...it is...the discipline they undertake in order to move away from the self and encounter the world, which is the real work of living. (Ufan, 2011)

Within the liminal space of the theatre stage or the pictorial image an alternative, fictive reality is created where *anything* can happen; a space that, as the Chorus assures us in the Prologue to *Henry V*, really does on our 'imaginary forces work.' (*Henry V* Prologue, 18).

A major concern in this project, whether a painting can link past and present, is inherent throughout. The influence of the Renaissance signifies an aesthetic as well as temporal ambiguity in these paintings, and the distinctive nature of the Globe theatre added a further layer of complexity and uncertainty to my practice. A principal strength and originality of this body of work lies in the contextual focus of the Globe, which was the stimulus and fundamental framework for this project. Shakespeare's Globe has been seen by some as an anachronism, a paradox, a rejection of the new, an attempt to cling on to an irrelevant past, and my practice has on occasion drawn similar comments. But the present theatre is an example of a positive and productive collaboration between contemporary practice and historical research and similarly, in this project, the theoretical and practical enquiry has

resulted in a body of work that embraces and expresses diverse transhistorical references. Contemporary performance in the contemporary Globe was my primary source of visual reference, but it was preoccupation with the past that was the dominant influence while working at the theatre gathering information and planning compositions. The figures in my paintings are imagined as belonging to both now and then – flitting back and forth, like the imagination of the viewer, across the threshold between past and present.

Re-inventing, re-presenting and re-imagining Shakespeare continues to thrive in literature, research and performance, but rarely in the visual arts. Despite persistent and wide-ranging Shakespearean research, exploring every conceivable connection, investigation has been almost exclusively through the media of words, film or performance. Practical creative responses have similarly been largely expressed through creative writing, performance, or screen adaptations. But engagement with Shakespeare in the visual arts has been sporadic and transitory, and has hitherto attracted little interest from the academic community.

This project addresses this gap in knowledge, offering a fresh contemporary contribution to Shakespearean studies, and clearly demonstrates that painting is a singularly appropriate and valid means of expressing the complex interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional themes of this enquiry. There are shifting states of perception and association in the painted image that are able to convey and embody ambiguity, transformation, and the overarching theme of liminality that permeates and underpins this body of work.

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Figure 28: Rosalind Lyons, 2010. *Puppet and Masks*. [Oil on board, 90cm x 75cm] (Private collection).

Figure 29: Piero della Francesca, c.1455-60. *The Flagellation of Christ*. [Oil and tempera on panel] (Galleria Nazionale della Marche, Urbino). Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagellation_of_Christ_\(Piero_della_Francesca\)#/media/File:Piero_-_The_Flagellation.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagellation_of_Christ_(Piero_della_Francesca)#/media/File:Piero_-_The_Flagellation.jpg) [Accessed 20 August 2015]

Figure 30: Rosalind Lyons, 2011. *Watching Rehearsals I*. [Oil on board, 90cm x 60cm] (Private collection).

Figure 31: Rosalind Lyons, 2011. *Watching Rehearsals II*. [Oil on board, 90cm x 60cm] (Private collection).

Figure 32: Rosalind Lyons, 2011. *And These Are Not Fairies*.

[Oil on board, 90cm x 60cm] (Private collection).

Figure 33: Rosalind Lyons, 2010. *Following Darkness*.

[Oil on canvas, 60cm x 45cm] (Private collection).

Figure 34: Rosalind Lyons, 2010. *Fool and Puppet*. [Oil on board, 120cm x 90cm]

(Private collection).

Figure 35 & 36: Rosalind Lyons, Sketchbook drawings of Fool from *Henry VIII*.

Figure 37: Rosalind Lyons, 2012. *It is But a Shadow's Shadow*.

[Oil on board, 90cm x 80cm] (Private collection).

Figure 38: Rosalind Lyons, 2012. *Tis Not So Sweet Now as it was Before*.

[Oil on board, 120cm x 60cm] (Private collection).

Figure 39: Rosalind Lyons, 2009. *Cesario and Olivia*. [Oil on board, 90cm x 90cm]

(Private collection).

Figure 40: Rosalind Lyons, 2009. *Juliet*. [Oil on canvas, 60cm x 45cm] (Private

collection).

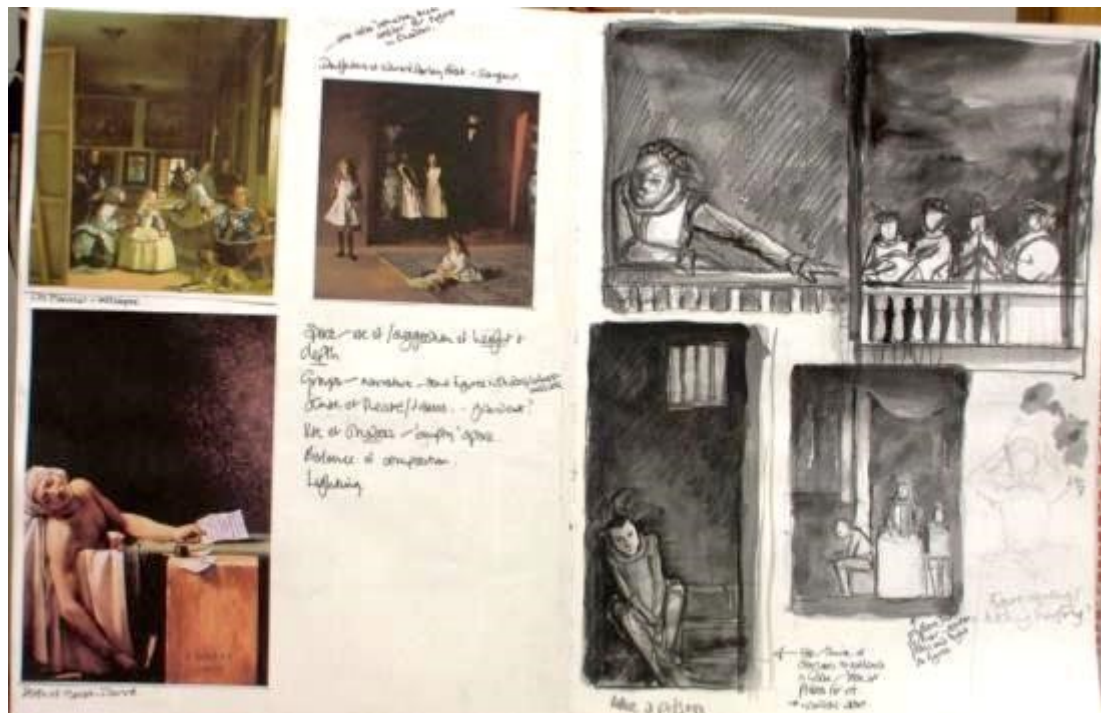
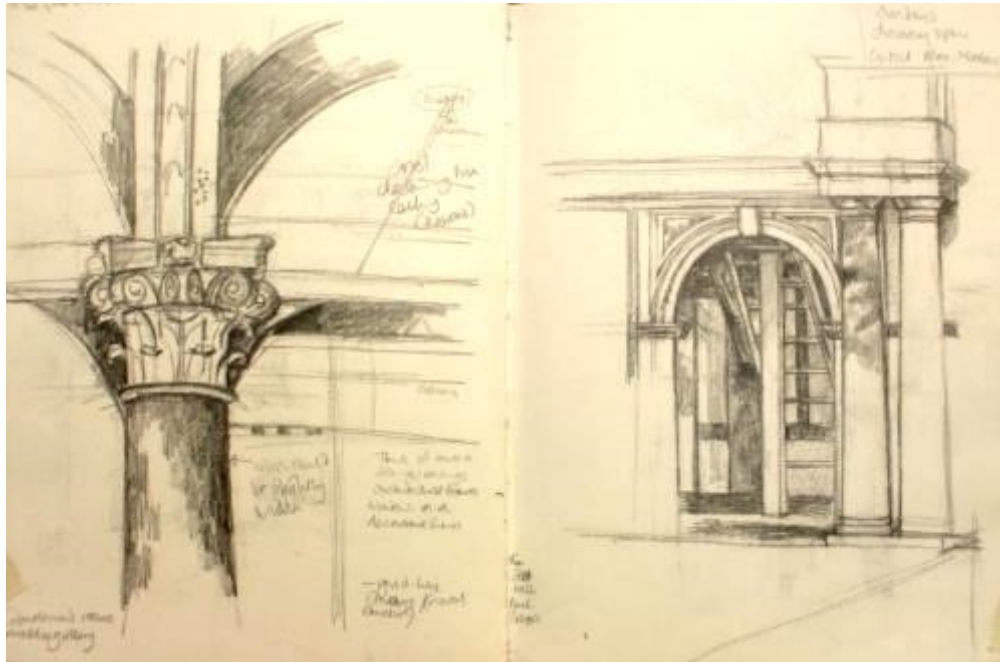
Figure 41: Rosalind Lyons, 2011. *Fleance*. [Oil on board, 120cm x 60cm]

(Private collection).

APPENDIX 1

Selected images from sketchbooks, 2009-2012.

The following drawings and notes were made in the auditorium at Shakespeare's Globe during rehearsals, and in the props and costume stores. Some examples show development of ideas for subsequent compositions.













Appendix II

Photographic reference

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 2010-2012

Auditorium



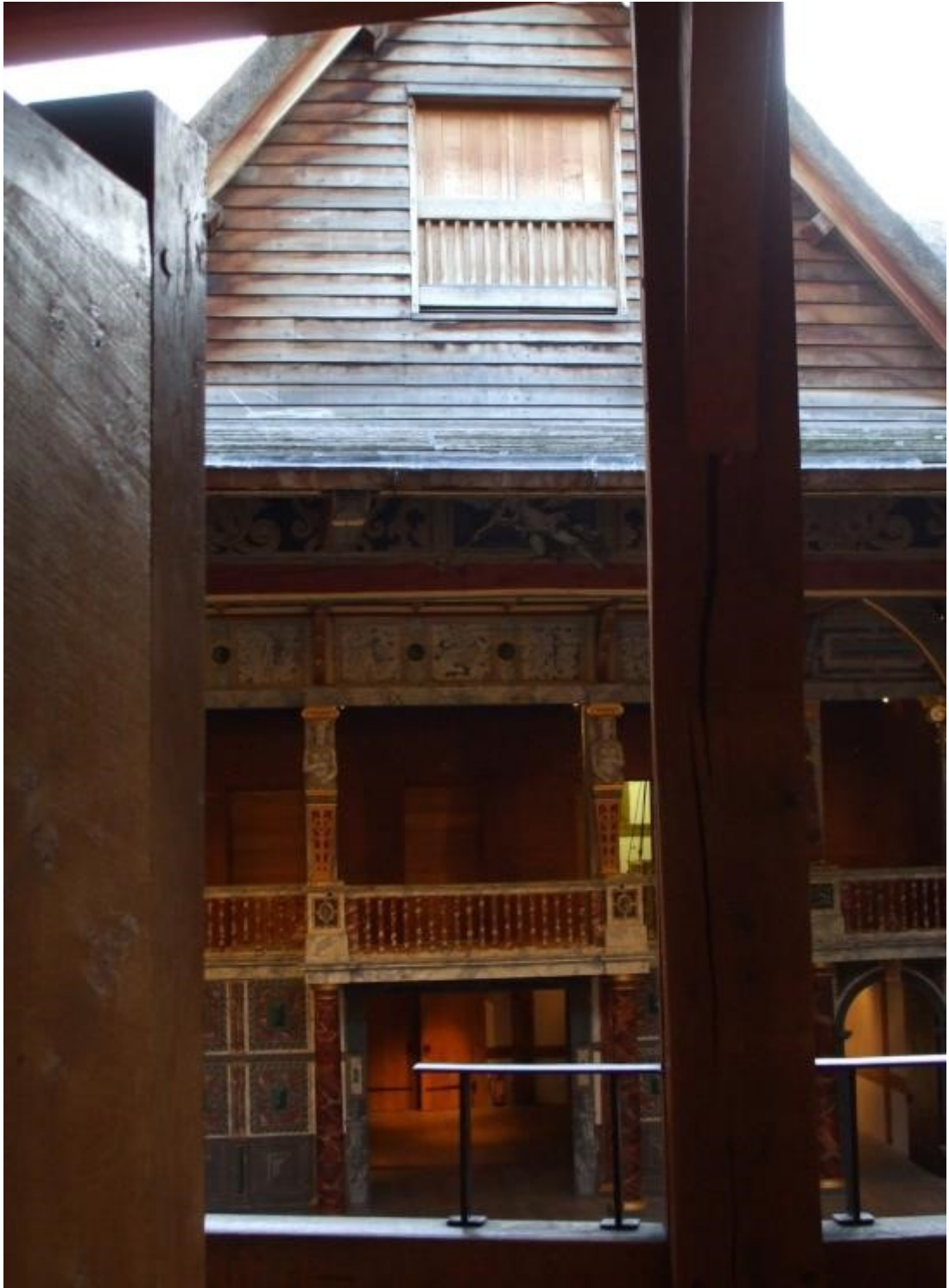














Rehearsal and performance



Anne Boleyn, by Howard Brenton. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



Anne Boleyn, by Howard Brenton. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



Anne Boleyn, by Howard Brenton. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



The Merry Wives of Windsor. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



The Merry Wives of Windsor. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



The Merry Wives of Windsor. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.



The Merry Wives of Windsor. Shakespeare's Globe, 2010.

Puppets and masks

Props store, Shakespeare's Globe.

























Costume

Original Practices costume store, Shakespeare's Globe.









